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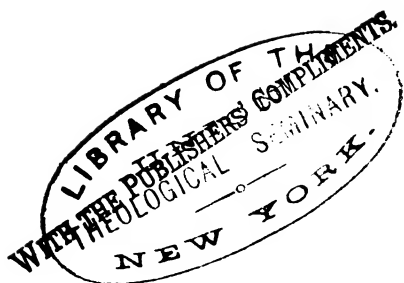
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Happiness in the spiritual life, or, The secret of the Lord

William Clavell
Ingram

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IN
THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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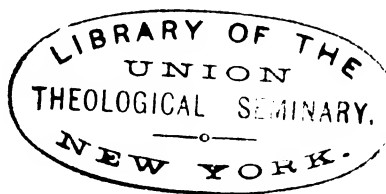
HAPPINESS IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

OR
'The Secret of the Lord'

A SERIES OF PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

BY THE
REV. WILLIAM CLAVELL INGRAM, M.A.
HONORARY CANON OF PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL
AND VICAR OF S. MATTHEW'S, LEICESTER

'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will
show them His covenant — *Psalm xxv 14*



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TO
MY SISTER
MARY PAGE HUBBACK
IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION
OF
MUCH LOVING HELP

PREFACE

THE CONTENTS of this volume were originally spoken at the special mid-day services held in St. Nicholas Church, Liverpool, during the Lenten seasons, from 1887 to 1891.

The Addresses have been somewhat recast, and are now published in the present form in the hope that they may be helpful to those who have frequently asked for some record of what was then said.

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A Dissertation on Life.

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A DISSERTATION ON LIFE.

‘What is your life?’—ST. JAMES iv. 14.

OF all the questions which we can put to ourselves there are few more solemn, serious, or important, few more full of thrilling personal interest, than this, ‘What is my life?’

We are all of us more or less familiar with that question in one or other of its forms.

At certain times of our lives there have come to each of us some such thoughts as these.

Here I am in this world, living on from day to day, with some joys and many sorrows, in the midst of all kinds of difficulties and perplexities. Time is passing rapidly away; I am daily growing older; one after another my friends and dear ones, my companions and acquaintances, are passing away out of life. I, too, must die ere very long. How comes it that I am here at all? Why am I here? What does it all mean?

‘What is my life?’

Some such thoughts as these do come to us from time to time during our lives, and then, perhaps, they pass quite away from our minds, and for a while we go on again in all the monotonous routine of daily work, not troubling ourselves about the matter at all.

It would, however, be well—would it not?—if such

thoughts remained with us—at least until we arrived at some satisfactory answer to the question, ‘What is my life?’ For until we do really bring home to ourselves what our life is, and what it does mean, it is certain that it will not be to us the real and serious, the important and glorious, thing it ought to be.

Now let us, for a few moments, look out into the great field of human life and seek, in the lives of men as we see them, for an answer to this question, ‘What is your life?’

What do the lives of men appear to say in answer to that question?

First, sad as the fact is, it will hardly be denied that the lives of many seem to answer the question somewhat in this way:

‘Life is one prolonged joke out of which I must get as much amusement as I can while it lasts. Or life is to be enjoyed in the pleasures of the present, and, inasmuch as pleasure, as I understand it, lies in bodily indulgence, I will get every possible pleasure that I can out of life; I will satisfy my passions and my appetites, my tastes and my desires, no matter what happens: let it be a merry life, even though it be a short one. Or, inasmuch as luxury and pleasure can only be secured by wealth, I will do all I can to get wealth that I may spend it in getting enjoyment out of life.’

Now we have no sympathy whatever with any such answer as that to the question, ‘What is your life?’ All such answers, however they may be disguised by fair words, have the madness of folly stamped upon them. We pass them by as utterly unworthy of a moment’s consideration.

But as we look again, we do see answers which,

however imperfect they may be, do, nevertheless, touch our sympathies.

For instance, what is the answer which the lives of the young and happy seem to give?

There are lives, pleasant, bright, and fair, the course of which seems to lie along a pathway strewn with flowers, bright and gay in the genial sunshine. As yet no dark, gloomy shadow has fallen across it ; no great obstacle has yet been met with ; and the dark valley of the Shadow of Death seems to be so far away beyond the distant hills that it is not, as yet, even thought of. And such lives seem to answer the question, 'What is your life?' with a merrily ringing laugh and say, 'Oh, life is a joy, life is a glorious, pleasant, and happy thing, joyous now and full of bright visions of greater joy to come!'

And there is much that is true in that answer. Yes, life ought to be a 'happy thing, joyous now and full of bright visions of greater joy to come,' and the young ought to take a bright and happy view of life.

But the answer is not sufficient.

We turn, next, to the toiling ones of the earth, to those whose whole life seems to be but one long, never-ceasing, monotonous round of toil and labour, a perpetual struggle for existence, and the answer we read there, as we look at the picture there set before us, is something after this sort :

'Life is a wearisome thing, dreary, cheerless, and painful, hardly worth the living.'

And there is something of truth in that, too, alas !

Once more we turn and look at the lives of the suffering, the weary, and the sad ; and too often the answer met with there is, 'Life is but a valley of tears ;

life is one long funeral procession of dead hopes and withered memories.'

And there is something of truth in that answer also

But no one of these answers by itself is enough, nor indeed are they all of them together sufficient to satisfy us. The heart faints as life goes on and the fair vision of youthful days fades ; the heart wearies at last of the monotonous, and unrelieved, round of toil and labour ; and the heart breaks in the valley of tears.

Life must be something far better than all this. It must have more meaning in it. I want a better answer to the question, 'What is my life ?' I want an answer that shall satisfy my heart ; an answer which, forming a true and firm basis of action, shall hold good throughout, and shall give a right direction to joy, relieve the monotony of toil, and bring comfort in sorrow.

And now, in our search after such an answer to the question, let us go to the root of the matter and try to get an answer to the preliminary question, 'What is life ?' that strange, mysterious thing which we call life.

It is impossible to define it accurately. It cannot be seen ; science cannot reveal it ; it cannot be dissected or analysed. We can see evidences of its existence, it is true.

I have a plant growing in my window. It puts forth its leaves and its buds ; presently the buds open out into flowers, and the flowers are succeeded by the fruits ; and I say of it that it lives. Later on its leaves fall ; the bare stem alone remains ; but yet in that bare stem I can discern signs of life, and I still say of it that it lives and that it will probably bud out again. But the time may come when that stem becomes brittle ; it breaks off in my hand. I examine it, I take it out of the ground, I

shake the earth off its roots ; they, too, are withered and mouldy, or dry and brittle, and I see that the plant is dead. What has left it ? Its life. What was that ? Ah ! I cannot tell ; I may be able to say what was the cause that led to the life leaving the plant ; but what that mysterious thing which we call its life was I cannot say beyond this, that it was something which I could destroy, but which I could neither give nor restore.

The same mystery surrounds the question, and the same difficulty arises, as we think of the higher form of life in the animal world. I have a bird in its cage hanging up in my room. It is bright and cheerful ; it lives, but the time comes when it no longer sings ; it refuses to eat, its feathers droop, and I say of it that it is ill, and that I fear it may die. Later on I find that it has fallen from its perch ; it is lying on the floor of the cage. I take it out. I find it cold and stiff. It is dead. Again, what has left it ? Its life. What was that ? I cannot tell beyond this, that it was something which I could destroy, but which I could neither give nor restore.

As we think of the still higher form of life, the life of man, the same mystery still surrounds the question. We have long watched by the bedside of our sick friend. Hopes and fears have alternated in our hearts with regard to him. At times it seemed as though he had passed away, and then again there had been a slight revival, and by certain signs we knew that he still lived. But presently the end came, the last sigh was uttered, the heart ceased to beat, the breath was no longer drawn, and we said to each other, in sorrowful whispers, ' He is gone ! ' What has left the body ? The life. What was that ? I cannot tell what it was, but I know it was

something which neither I nor any skill of man could give or restore. God alone can do that.

‘The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the Name of the Lord.’

Life is, then, the gift of God. He alone can give it. He alone can restore it. He alone has the right to take it away.

But though life itself cannot be defined more accurately than by saying that it is the gift of God, yet the character of the gift as seen in its exercise may be described.

Life has been described as correspondence to environment ; a description which is most useful, whether it be applied in man’s physical, moral, or spiritual life. Another description of life, which in some ways is perhaps even more useful, is that which is given us by Lacordaire, who says that ‘life is a fertile movement, death sterile immobility,’ and he goes on to speak somewhat thus :

‘Fertility always presents itself to us together with movement ; therefore where these are there is life. All moves in nature ; therefore all nature is living. As there are many degrees in movement, so, too, are there many degrees in life ; for instance, there is the life of the plant, the life of the animal, and the life of man.

‘In man there is physical, moral, and spiritual movement and fertility. Life is movement, because it is activity, and all activity is expressed by movement more or less perfect. If life be movement, whither does it go ? God is the summit of all life. Life, then, is a fertile movement whose principle, centre, and term is God.’

We come, then, to this as part of our answer, to the question, ‘What is your life ?’

'My life is the gift of God. It comes to me from God. It must be lived for God. And it must be accounted for to God.'

It is this thought that will give to life its true value, importance, and dignity.

My life is to be lived for God. Is this easy? No; there is much difficulty in the way.

We come, now, to another part of our answer. This life that has been given to me by God, and which I must live for Him; this life, which is a fertile movement whose principle, centre, and term is God, must be a battle against all that opposes its progress towards Him, that is to say, against evil.

And life will never be true and vigorous, and really lived for God, until this be realised, viz. that it must be one long-continued battle against evil. We shall have to speak more fully, later on, of this great battle of life; here it may be sufficient to notice two points only:

First, that the battle is inevitable; and secondly, that it is a battle in which we may conquer.

It is inevitable because evil meets us everywhere, and we cannot escape from being attacked by it. Wherever man is, there evil is to be found. Day by day, and hour by hour, we are brought into contact with it. It meets us everywhere—at home and abroad, in our work and in our recreations, in the very precincts of the sanctuary itself—and everywhere it forces the contest upon us. The battle is inevitable.

But evil is not invincible; it is powerful, and it is widespread, but it may be overcome. It has been confronted and overcome by the most magnificent and the most irresistible power—the power of the Incarnation and of the Cross.

He in whom was no evil has overcome evil. The life of the Incarnate God was throughout a battle, and a victorious battle, with this foe ; and all along the history of the Church men and women, and little children, too, thank God, have fought and have overcome in the power of the Cross of Christ ; and what they did we can do. Fight we must ; be on God's side we must. Nay, more, we are on God's side ; we are the soldiers of Christ, never let us forget that. Baptised into Christ, we were signed with the sign of the Cross in token that we should not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and fight manfully under His banner. We are Christ's soldiers ; we must fight this battle ; but if we are to fight effectually we must be trained soldiers.

Let us consider, for a moment, this question of training.

We live in an age of systematic, scientific training.

Think of all the physical training of the body that goes on in the present day. The training for all kinds of athletic exercises—unquestionably good in itself—tending to develop strength and endurance. It is all carried out on systematic, and scientific, principles.

Or, again, think of all the training of the senses. The eye is being taught to see beauty in form and colour, both in art and in nature, far beyond anything that was known or thought of fifty years ago. Our shops, the furniture of our rooms, the pictures with which we decorate our walls, the streets and buildings, all bear testimony to the fact that the age is one in which the eye is being trained. So, too, the ear is being trained ; music is taught and appreciated in all classes of society far more generally than it was in past generations—and all this testifies to the training that is going on.

The mind, too, is being trained to-day as perhaps it never has been before; education in all its various branches is being brought within the reach of all classes—and that, not merely elementary education, but the more advanced education; knowledge of all kinds of science is no longer the exclusive possession of any one class of persons, but is now brought within the reach of all. Whether the world is any the happier, or any the better, for it, is another question altogether. But there it is, all testifying to the fact that the age in which we live is an age of systematic, and scientific, training.

Now this brings us to another point. How about the moral and spiritual faculties? They need training also, for without that all else is not enough. The athlete may not after all be running 'the race that is set before him,' and it is quite possible that art, and music and refinement, may be enlisted on the side of evil.

Moral and spiritual training is needed for the soldiers of Jesus Christ if the Christian race is to be successfully run, and if the battle with evil is to be effectually maintained. That is to say, the conscience must be trained, and trained by constant obedience. Conscience obeyed places a man upon the Divine pathway of duty.

What is duty? To do one's duty is to respond to the recognised obligations of life. But it may be said there are many different standards of duty. The obligations of life differ in so many ways that in no two lives are they, perhaps, exactly the same.

Quite so, and we would not bind all men to adopt the same standard. We would say, at any rate at first, 'Take your own standard and live up to it.'

You have a standard of right and wrong, have you

not? Deep down there in your innermost soul, in your conscience, you know that certain things are right and that certain things are wrong.

The question is, Do you live up to that standard of duty? Do you really respond to those obligations of life which in your conscience you do recognise? Do that and it will lead you on to see duty more and more plainly.

My life, then, is the gift of God, and in living it for Him I must maintain a continual battle with evil, and to do this effectually my conscience must be trained—trained by constant exercise in obedience.

We pass on to another point.

Life is a great opportunity. My life is my opportunity for working out my own salvation with fear and trembling.

Let us remember that this opportunity may be, and, alas! often is, missed. All sorts of excuses are made for neglecting it. Some will plead one excuse, some another. 'I am so poor, life is such a struggle, that I have no time to think of religion. Or home difficulties are so great that they necessarily engross all my attention. Or the society in which I am compelled to move is so worldly and godless that I cannot live a godly life. If I were differently situated, or if I were elsewhere placed, I might be able to live to God, but here I cannot.'

Ah! all such excuses are false; all this is untrue.

The circumstances of life may indeed greatly help, or they may terribly hinder, the godly life. That is quite true. But no circumstances can compel a man to be either godly or ungodly. If they be for us let us use them and thank God for them. But if they be

against us let us by God's grace try to conquer them, trample them under foot and rise upon them. The greater the difficulties that are overcome, the greater is the glory of the victory.

Life is a great opportunity for doing work for God, not only in our own souls, but also in helping others. All round about us there are others who need the encouragement of good example, and the moral support of a brother who is standing firm in the face of temptation. Ah! what a grand thing it is to have lived an unselfish life whereby even one soul may have been helped to fight its battle successfully. But we must remember that this opportunity, great though it be, is but very short.

Life is very short. It is remarkable how the love of God has been revealed to us in the fact that in Holy Scripture He has used every conceivable imagery to impress upon men the truth that life is short.

You go out into the great field of nature and gaze upon its beauties, and through them He teaches you that life is short.

As you stand on some hillside, and look up into the glorious sky and watch the clouds as they roll by, He tells you that life passes like 'the trace of a cloud' driven before the wind.

As you watch, upon the mountain-side over against you, the shadow of that cloud, as it is driven across the sky, you see it flitting by and passing away, and you are reminded that life is 'like a shadow that departeth.'

As you look down into the valley beneath you and watch the morning mist, which at first hides the view but gradually rises and curls away, as the sun with its growing warmth dispels it, He tells you again that life

is like 'a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.'

You go out into your garden, and the imagery that there meets your eyes is made use of. Life, you are told, is like 'a flower' that fades, like 'the grass' that withers, like a 'leaf' that falls.

Or you think of what occurs in social life. Again the imagery there suggested is used for the same purpose of teaching the brevity of human life. You are told that life is like 'a post that hasteth by,' leaving its message and passing on quickly out of sight ; that it is like 'the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day.' Or, like a race that is run, full of intense interest while it lasts, all eyes being fixed upon it, but which is quickly over and then the crowd disperses and all is forgotten.

Or, again, you go down to the seashore, and once more the imagery that presents itself is used to teach how short life is, and how quickly it passes by. You are told that life is like an arrow shot at a mark, leaving no trace of its rapid flight ; that it is like a bird flying swiftly through the air, parting it with the stroke of her wings, and passing through, but leaving no mark of where she went ; or like a ship ploughing her way through the waves and leaving no track of her path behind her.

Or you think of the experience of personal life. Sleeping and waking the imagery suggested by your experience is brought to bear to teach the shortness of life. It is like a dream when one awaketh ; a dream so real, so vivid, that in it the faces of those whom 'we have loved long since and lost awhile,' are seen again, and the voices long silent are once more heard ; and then we

wake and all that seemed so real to us but a moment before is vanished and gone. Or life is like a tale that is told ; a tale full of thrilling interest for the moment, engrossing all the thought and all the attention of the hearers, but soon told and ended. Or as you sit by the fireside you are reminded that life's duration is like a spark that flies upwards, shining brightly for a moment and then disappearing.

Even the occupations of men are pressed into the same service, and we are told that life is like a shepherd's tent, ever being moved on from place to place, tarrying only for a few days in one spot. That life is a pilgrimage. That life is like a weaver's shuttle passing with the rapidity of lightning from one hand of the weaver to the other, as at each passage it does something to complete the pattern of beauty which he is working out. So each life, though it be short and as quickly over, as the passage of the shuttle, passing out of the hand of God into the hand of God, yet has its work to do, and is to leave behind it completed some little part of the great and glorious plan which God is working out in the world.

And of all the images used perhaps the most beautiful is this, that life is a tarrying for the Bridegroom ; for Him who saith, ' Behold I come quickly.'

Every imagery that could be used has been used by God to impress upon us the fact that life here is very short.

And then as we turn from the book of revelation to the book of our own experience, what do we read there but the same truth enforced over and over again ?

As children we looked at life as being long, and the thought of the end hardly came to us at all. In the

days of our vigorous youth life still looked long to us, and even though, from time to time, the end did appear to us, it was, so to speak, quite in the far distance. In middle age life began to appear much shorter, and then the years swept by in their rapid flight; and in later years, as men look back upon the past, how short it all seems to be! The aged speak of the days of their childhood as of yesterday, and the days, weeks, months, and years fly by faster and faster, bringing the end ever nearer.

Where are those who in the days of our youth stirred the world with their burning words, or charmed the ear with their music and their song, or delighted the eye with their works of art, or kindled enthusiasm by their heroic deeds? For the most part passed away, teaching that life is short.

Where are all the friends, companions, and acquaintances of our early days? For the most part passed away, reminding us that life is very short.

Where is the family circle into which Death has not entered? Ah, how many of our dear ones have been called home! And as one by one these gaps have been made in the family circle, as one by one the ties that, in our loved ones, bound us to this life have been severed, what did it all teach but that life here is very short, very transitory?

Yes, life is very short. Is it too short? Yes, it is too short for certain things. It is too short to be wasted. It is too short for quarrels and misunderstandings. It is too short for self-pleasing. It is too short for reaching here the ideal of perfection which we aim at.

But, thank God, it is not too short for repentance; it is not too short for working out our own salvation with fear

and trembling ; it is not too short for us to realise the gift, to seize the opportunity, to fight the battle, and to win the Crown.

It is not too short for us to do the will of God, so far as His will for us individually is concerned.

Our answer, then, to the question, 'What is your life?' is this :

My life is the gift of God ; it must be lived for Him and it must be accounted for to Him. My life is a fertile movement of which God must be the principle, the centre, and the term. My life must be a continual battle with evil. My life is the great opportunity given to me here on earth in which to work out my own salvation with fear and trembling, and in which to do work for God by helping others. My life here is very short.

But, short though it be, if only I be faithful and obedient, it is but the beginning for me of Eternity ; for 'he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

I.

Happiness in the Spiritual Life.

- I. WHAT HAPPINESS IS, AND THE WAYS IN WHICH IT IS SOUGHT.
- II. HOW HAPPINESS HAS BEEN LOST, AND HOW IT MAY BE REGAINED.
- III. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL NEEDED IN ORDER TO REGAIN HAPPINESS.
- IV. THE POWER NEEDED IN ORDER TO REGAIN HAPPINESS.
- V. THE BLESSEDNESS OF HAPPINESS REGAINED.

I.

*WHAT HAPPINESS IS, AND THE WAYS
IN WHICH IT IS SOUGHT.*

‘Happy is the man that findeth wisdom.’—PROVERBS iii. 13.

THE one thing that the heart of man desires, and that every heart desires ; the one thing which, in some way or other, men are always and everywhere seeking ; the one thing to which all hope to succeed in attaining is happiness.

We all desire happiness, and we rightly desire it, for beyond all question we were created in order that we might be happy.

Now we are told that ‘God is love,’ and in that revelation as to the nature of God we are able to read something of the mystery of creation. It will, we suppose, be admitted that we can only arrive at any idea of the love of God by approaching that question through what we know of human love in its purest, highest, and most unselfish form. Certainly the love of God is something infinitely higher than the most perfect human love ; it is a love that ‘passeth knowledge’ ; but still by observing the law which rules human love we may see something of the law by which the Divine love works.

Now in order that the highest human love may have

its free and full exercise, three things are necessary : first, there must be someone who shall be the object of love ; next, there must be likeness between the loving one and the beloved one ; and, lastly, there must be union between the two.

It is true that in the mystery of the Holy Trinity there was the full and all-sufficient field for the exercise of the perfect love of God. There were the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, each the object of the love of the others. In the eternal equality of the three Persons there was the perfection of likeness. And in the Unity of the Trinity there was perfect union.

But still it pleased the Almighty that the Divine love should move according to this law which we have noticed, and therefore it pleased Him to create recipients of His bounty—objects of His love. He created the heavenly hosts, the material world, the animal creation, and lastly man in the image of Himself ; and the eternal purpose of God was that ‘ He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.’ And thus man, in whom both the spiritual and the material creations were united, and who was himself to be united with God through the Incarnation of the Eternal Son, was created the especial object of the love of God.

God made us, therefore, that He might love us.

Again we see this characteristic of pure and unselfish human love, viz. that it ever seeks by ceaseless effort to promote, and with energetic purpose to secure, the happiness of the beloved one. So, too, is this characteristic to be observed in every manifestation of Divine love, whether in creation, in redemption, or in sanctification.

God made us that He might love us, and, loving us

with a perfect love, He necessarily designed our happiness. Here we have all that it is practically necessary for us to know of the great mystery of creation.

God, who is love, created us that He might love us, that we might love Him, and that, loving Him and being loved by Him, we might be eternally happy in union with Him through our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

Happiness, then, in union with God was the end and purpose for which man was created.

Bearing that thought in mind, we go on to notice how marvellously man was, by his creation, fitted for that end and purpose—how throughout all his complex nature he was made fitted for, and capable of, happiness.

Man was created an animal being. He was, it is true, inferior to many of the animals around him in strength, swiftness, and agility of body; yet he was created their ruler, the lord and master of the animal world. He had given to him all the powers, senses, appetites, and passions of the animal nature—all those powers and gifts which, if used as the Almighty Creator intended them to be used, and according to the laws laid down for, and within the limits assigned to, their use, were calculated to secure for him happiness, so far as the mere animal nature was concerned.

But above and beyond this there was given to man a far higher nature: he was endowed with spiritual instincts, appetites, affections, and desires. He had a soul, with the great gifts of memory, understanding, and will; he had given to him the power of thought, whereby he could at any moment pass beyond the frontiers of the merely visible, present, and finite, and live and move in the invisible, the future, and the infinite; he was endowed with the gift of memory, whereby he could recall the past; with

the gift of imagination, by which he was enabled to build up fabrics of beauty out of the materials supplied by the impressions of the past, the observations of the present, and the anticipations of the future ; with reason, whereby he was able to draw sound conclusions ; and with the gift of articulate speech, whereby he was able to express his affections, impart to others his thoughts, and set before his associates the pictures drawn by his imagination, and the conclusions arrived at by his reason—with all these marvellous gifts, which, if used aright, were capable of securing to him all that social and moral happiness which lay in his intercourse with his fellows.

Man was created a spiritual being belonging as distinctly to the spiritual as he did to the material world. He had given to him a nature capable of immortality, and indwelt of the Holy Spirit ; he was endowed with a conscience taught of God, and with the power of holding communion with his Maker and with the spiritual, and unseen, world ; he was endowed with all spiritual perceptions, clear and bright, whereby he could enjoy the delights of God's presence. He was therefore created for, and capable of, happiness in all the powers of his complex nature, and so fitted to fulfil the end and purpose for which he was called into being.

Now we must remember that God's glory is manifested in the fulfilment of His purpose. It is right, then, that we should desire to be happy and that we should seek for happiness, for this was God's purpose in creating us ; and thus we come to the one central thought which throughout these considerations we will strive to bear steadily in mind, viz. that—

‘God's glory promoted by, and manifested in, the happiness of man is to be the true end and aim of our life.’

In speaking of this question of happiness we will try and consider the subject in the following order:—

What happiness is, and what are some of the ways in which men seek after it.

How happiness has been lost, and how it may be regained.

The knowledge we need in order to be able to regain happiness.

The power we need in the effort to regain happiness.

And lastly, the perfect satisfaction which will ensue on happiness being regained.

And we will begin by trying to answer this question—

‘What is happiness?’

Now, as a matter of fact, the word ‘happiness’ does not occur in our English version of the Bible at all; and yet the Bible, from beginning to end, is the history of happiness given, lost, and regained. It opens with the story of the happiness in Eden, when, creation completed, ‘God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good;’ and it ends with the glorious picture of happiness regained for man by Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God, and enjoyed by man in the heavenly City.

What is happiness? We will try to explain what we understand by it. Definitions are exceedingly useful, and it is quite true many of our difficulties as to religious questions would never arise at all, and many others would disappear so soon as they suggested themselves, if more attention were paid to definitions, and if we started with a clear understanding of what we mean by the terms we use. In the teaching of all other sciences the very first step taken is to lay down clear and distinct definitions. Surely it ought, one would think, to be so in the case of this the queen of sciences, and in the teaching of the

highest knowledge. But the difficulty here lies in the fact that the word which denotes that which we would define is not unfrequently used in more than one sense, and that therefore a definition which might be perfectly accurate when the word is used in one sense might altogether fail when it is used in another sense. And this fact should always be borne in mind when we venture upon giving any definition.

Now happiness we think may be described as being 'the satisfaction experienced by the sentient being in the possession, and in the exercise, of perfectly healthful life.'

This definition appears to be a good one ; it satisfies our conception of happiness in every form of life.

It satisfies the conception which we are able to form of the happiness of God, the great Creator Himself, His happiness being the perfect satisfaction He has in the possession, and in the exercise, of His everlasting, self-existent, and perfect life. Perfect in that life, Himself the source of all life, the giver of all life, His happiness is perfect ; nothing can mar it nor interfere to disturb it.

So, too, our conception of the happiness of the holy angels and of all the heavenly host is satisfied by this definition. Purely spiritual beings, they have life in a perfectly healthful, vigorous condition, and absolutely untainted by disease, and their perfectly pure and spiritual desires are satisfied in the possession, and in the exercise, of that perfectly healthful life.

Descending in thought from the spiritual to the material world, we find that the definition also satisfies our conception of happiness as it is experienced in the animal creation, in the lower forms of life in the sentient creature. The lark as it rises higher and higher in the bright morning sky, singing its song of gladness, and of conscious,

or of unconscious, praise and thanksgiving to its blessed Creator, is surely giving utterance to the happiness described by our definition. The butterfly as it flits from flower to flower, and revels in the sunshine, exhibits the satisfaction which it experiences in the possession, and in the exercise, of healthful life ; the happiness of which it is capable lies in that.

And then, lastly, as we come to think of man, who, as we have said, is the link in which are united the material and the spiritual worlds, the definition still holds good, and satisfies our conception of his happiness, viz. that it is 'the satisfaction experienced by the sentient being in the possession, and in the exercise, of perfectly healthful life.' But here we have to consider, for a moment, what it is that we mean when we speak of the life of man. We must remember that the life of man is threefold : there is his physical life, his moral and social life, and his spiritual life ; and, therefore, in order that he may be happy he must have perfectly healthful life, not only as regards his physical, but as regards his moral and spiritual nature also.

That our happiness is very much interfered with by physical pain, infirmity, sickness, and disease is a fact that is beyond question ; no one denies the fact that the body has a very great influence over the mind, or that bodily disease and pain will often produce irritability, depression of spirits, and various kinds of mental distress and suffering. Physical pain does, and must, interfere with the happiness of the sufferer ; but, on the other hand, absence of health of body, after all, interferes far less with our happiness than does either moral or spiritual disease. This is a matter of observation, for who is there who has not known of cases where physical

pain and long-continued suffering, borne with marvellous patience and resignation, have existed together with a wonderful serenity of mind which has testified to a happiness which could rise superior to bodily suffering? Who has not known the happy blind man, or the patient and contented cripple, or the bright and cheerful though confirmed invalid? The fact that a certain degree of happiness may exist together with physical suffering is testified to in some of the most touching records of human life, whether we find them in authenticated histories or in the life-like pictures of some of the most touching, because truest, works of fiction. There is ample evidence of the fact that a certain degree of happiness can exist together with bodily pain, but no one will be prepared to assert that perfect happiness exists where there is lacking physical health.

But in man there is not merely the life of the body, there is also the moral and social life—the life of the soul as it holds communion with the world of thought and feeling around it. This is a far higher form of life than that of the merely physical existence—the life of the affections, of the memory, of the understanding, of all the intellectual powers, and of the will. Man's happiness is far more largely concerned in his having this life in a healthful condition. His happiness is far more deeply affected by disease in this life of the soul than by bodily sickness.

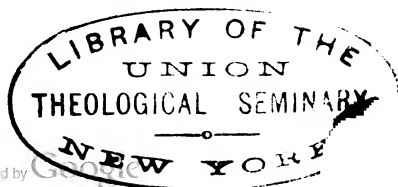
Bodily suffering affects the happiness of the moment, but the pain having passed away the remembrance of it very soon fades out of the mind. And the recollection of the pain of the past, even so far as it may be remembered, seldom, if ever, interferes with the happiness of the present. But it is very different in the matter of wounded

affections and disappointed hopes, and all the pain and sorrow which disease of the moral and social life inflicts. The remembrance of such things does not pass away ; the pain may after a time, and often does, become dulled, but it lasts. The heart once broken is never quite healed. The wound inflicted by the blow that broke it remains, and at times makes its presence felt.

Then, again, bodily pain, for the most part, affects only the happiness of the person who suffers ; but disease of the moral and social life always affects the happiness of others. No matter how healthy may be the bodily life, if there be disease of the moral life, if the social life be disturbed by pride, envy, anger, covetousness, lust, sloth, or gluttony, there will not be, there cannot be, happiness. For happiness to exist in the social life that life must be in a healthful condition.

Then there is, lastly, the highest form of man's life—the spiritual life—that life of man which is indwelt by God the Holy Spirit ; that life which has its conscience taught of God, and which has the power of holding communion with God ; that life of man which is most intimately connected with, and is intended to rule and to direct, the moral and the physical life. Man's happiness lies especially in the possession, and in the exercise, of that life in a healthful condition ; for no matter how healthy his body may be, no matter how free from trouble, pain, or anxiety his social life may be, he cannot be happy unless he be at peace with God. Of all that interferes with the happiness of man there is nothing which does so more emphatically than the fear-haunted conscience.

Now, as we look out into the great field of human life, two facts in connection with this matter at once arrest our attention.



The first of these facts is, that unhappiness, rather than happiness, chiefly prevails.

Happiness in some sort is certainly to be found in varying degrees of development. But perfect happiness of body, soul, and spirit is to be found nowhere here on earth. Seek to see it where we will, it is everywhere found to be but marred and imperfect.

And the second of these facts, which force themselves upon our notice, is that men are everywhere trying to find happiness; that they are ever seeking it in every conceivable way; and that of these their efforts, some partly succeed, others entirely fail.

Let us now consider some of the ways in which men seek after happiness. Putting aside altogether the foolish and degrading efforts to secure it, with which, as reasonable, serious beings, we can have no sympathy whatever; such as the childish expectation of finding it in a perpetual round of pleasure and amusement; the senseless effort to attain it by excitement and recklessness; the degrading pursuit of it in the unrestrained gratification of the senses, and in the indulgence of the passions of the lower nature—putting these aside altogether, as unworthy of aught except censure, let us try to examine some of the more serious ways in which men, with higher aspirations, are striving to secure happiness for themselves and for others; and remembering that all such serious efforts must in themselves be good and right, however much they may fail in attaining their object, let us also try to see wherein it is that they do fail.

First of all, then, there come before us the efforts which science makes to secure the happiness of mankind; and surely we may assume, may we not? that this is the end which all true science has directly or indirectly in view.

What we understand by science in its efforts to secure happiness will in the main be that science which deals with physical life, and with the laws which regulate it ; and, beyond all question, science has done much, is doing much, and probably will yet do far more, to secure and preserve the healthful life of the body. Medical science and surgical skill to-day work marvels in this direction. God in His mercy, in this our day, makes, through these means, the blind to see, the lame to walk, and the deaf to hear. It were difficult to over-estimate the relief that science has thus brought to suffering humanity. Then, again, science is daily teaching more clearly the laws which regulate bodily health ; and sanitary laws, better understood, more fully realised, and more effectually carried out, will always tend to promote happiness so far as it is attainable through bodily health ; and all this is good—we cannot but rejoice at it.

But science has its bounds which it cannot pass ; it is unable to compel obedience to those laws which, having discovered, it teaches ; and therefore it will necessarily fail, even in its own legitimate sphere, to secure perfect happiness.

Some men, again, will say that we must look to philosophy to bring happiness ; and certainly philosophy, whether ancient or modern, has its place in the serious search after happiness. It may teach, as the highest and best philosophy ever has taught, that happiness, having its seat in virtue, is not the exclusive possession of any one class of men ; that it cannot be purchased by wealth, banished by poverty, nor compelled to come at the bidding of power. Philosophy may do much by teaching maxims true and excellent in themselves ; maxims which if acted upon would unquestionably tend

towards the restoration of happiness ; but still it fails, and fails in this, that it cannot convey the power wherein to practise the maxims it teaches.

Others, again, would have us look to politics as a source whence happiness is to come, and we are quite ready to admit that the true and high-principled politician will have, as he ought to have, this aim in view. The great aim of the true politician and of the really great statesman will ever be to promote and to secure upon principles of truth and justice the greatest good, and therefore the greatest happiness, of the greatest number ; but surely no one is so foolish as to believe that political action, however true and just, will ever bring happiness to all.

But we are not left without a hope of attaining this happiness which we all desire and which it is right that we should all seek. There is a way in which it may be found.

‘Happy is the man that findeth wisdom.’ What is wisdom ? It is the power of judging rightly ; and that may perhaps be best translated thus :

‘Wisdom is choosing the right end, and using the right means of attaining it.’ That is wisdom, as we understand it here, and we venture to think that the more that description is thought out, the more will it be found to be a true one. Happy is the man that chooses the right end in life, and uses the right means of attaining it. At the very first outset, then, of our search after happiness it will be necessary that we should understand clearly what is the right end for man to seek, and then what are the right means which must be used to the attainment of that end.

II.

*HOW HAPPINESS HAS BEEN LOST, AND
HOW IT MAY BE REGAINED.*

‘Unhappiness is in their ways.’—PSALM xiv. 7 (Prayer Book Version).

WE have already said that, as we look out into the great field of human life, there forces itself upon our notice the fact that unhappiness—rather than happiness—chiefly prevails.

It may be objected that this is too gloomy a view to take of life ; but it is not a question of its being a gloomy view or not ; the question is, is it a true view of human life ? We venture to think that it is. We have already admitted that happiness, to a certain extent, is to be found in varying degrees of development, but it is found in perfection nowhere here on earth, and unhappiness is the rule.

If we look into our own personal lives, if we look into our hearts, surely we see the same thing there—a certain degree of happiness, but not perfect happiness ; there is always something or other that mars it or that interferes with it. The very best, the most happy of us, has, at any rate at times, to exclaim with St. Paul, ‘O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?’ Though he may still be able,

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in the deepest gratitude for help given, to add with the apostle, 'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

The statement of the Psalmist, in a certain and limited sense, is universally true of us all: 'Unhappiness is in their ways.' The true happiness for which we were created has been lost. The heart of humanity yearns to regain it. All through the ages men have agreed in holding that it ought to be regained, and they have argued, from various points of view, that it might be regained; but inasmuch as, apart from Revelation, they have failed to see clearly how it has been lost, they have failed also in seeing how it might be regained. With them there was nothing beyond the uncertainty of guesses and speculation; we Christians have the certainty of Revelation, which teaches us, first of all, how happiness has been lost.

How has happiness been lost?

It has been lost by sin.

What is sin? 'Sin is the transgression of the law.' Let us bear in mind that perfect definition, as it contrasts with this other, which is also a perfect definition, 'Love is the fulfilling of the law.' This contrast between 'love' and 'sin' will help us much in our considerations on happiness.

Happiness, then, has been lost by sin, and 'sin is the transgression of the law.'

Now, every transgression of law necessarily, and inevitably, brings its punishment, viz. disease, unhealth, and therefore the germ of unhappiness. As to this fact, observation, experience, and science are all agreed; they all endorse the teaching of Revelation.

It will be universally admitted that no one can with impunity break any one of the laws which govern and

regulate the health of the body. Sooner or later, in a greater or in a less degree, with an irresistible certainty and with a relentless impartiality, every such breach of law brings its punishment. No pleading of accident is permitted, no excuse is allowed, no ignorance of the law is admitted, as a valid reason for the remission of the penalty. Breach of sanitary law brings disease of the body and physical health suffers.

The very same thing is seen in the social life. Every breach of the moral law is necessarily followed, sooner or later, by disease of the social life. This punishment of the breach of law inevitably ensues.

And so it must be also in the case of the spiritual life. Every breach of God's law brings disease into the spiritual life.

No one doubts for a single moment the fact that, had there never been any breach by anyone of any of the laws of health, there would be no bodily disease. All physical disease we imagine could be scientifically traced back to some, conscious or unconscious, breach of the laws of health at some time or other in the history of the human race. Nor can anyone doubt that if all laws, physical, moral, and spiritual, were now, and had always been, perfectly obeyed there would be perfect health in the physical, moral, and spiritual life, and unhappiness would be unknown.

Happiness has been lost by sin, and 'sin is the transgression of the law.' It is the alienation of the will of the creature from the will of the Creator, and so rebellion against the laws of the Creator.

Now Revelation teaches us that man was created an animal being, a moral and social being, and a spiritual being, the spiritual part of man directing the moral part,

and ruling the animal part. He had work given him to do, and a law laid down whereby to rule his life. Had he gone on doing this work and obeying this law his three-fold life would have remained perfectly healthful, and he would have finally secured perfect happiness in that immortality of which he was created capable.

But man's will, separating itself from the will of God, refused to obey the law of God ; hence disease entered into the spiritual life, and so unhappiness and death. The higher will of man, rebelling against the will of God, in its turn lost its empire over the lower will, and rebellion and anarchy entering into the moral life, disease and unhappiness ensued. The animal nature, through which obedience to law should have been manifested in outward act, became the organ through which rebellion was carried out in the visible life, and again disease and consequent unhappiness were the result. The passions and appetites of the fleshly nature, no longer guided by the laws of God, and no longer restrained within the limits of those laws, became masters instead of servants, and so in the place of ministering to happiness brought about misery.

This is what is now to be seen on all sides in a greater or less degree. It is what we all experience in our own lives—this constant struggle that is going on within us between the higher and the lower nature. It was this same struggle which St. Paul knew to be going on in him when he said, ‘ I delight in the law of God after the inward man : but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.’

Revelation, then, accounts for the actual condition of life as we see it and experience it, and explains how

it is that happiness has been lost, and how it is that 'unhappiness is in their ways.'

But, thank God! Revelation does not stop here. It were but cold comfort to show how a thing has been lost unless that knowledge lead to its recovery.

Revelation goes further than this ; it tells us, not only how happiness has been lost, but also how it has been regained, for us ; in the love of God the Father, by the work and sufferings of God the Son, through the power of God the Holy Ghost ; and it goes on to tell us how happiness may be regained by us through the merits of Jesus Christ. It teaches us that the very first step in our effort to regain happiness must be that the will of God must be chosen by us as the end of life, and that the human will is to be brought into subjection to the Divine will.

Let us now look, for a few moments, at one aspect of the life of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Let us try to learn something on this point from the marvellous revelation of God made to us in, and through, the blessed Incarnation of His only-begotten Son.

The teaching of the life of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ is above all things practical teaching. What does that life teach? What does it reveal? Why, surely there is this lesson, which stands in the very forefront of all that marvellous teaching: 'That the will of God is that which is to be, not merely submitted to, but to be done ; to be actively carried out by the human will ; that there must be co-operation of the human will with the Divine will.'

Let us consider our blessed Lord's life from this point of view. Let us in thought, for a moment, go to Bethlehem, and, standing there by His manger-cradle,

listen to the cry of His Infant Voice. What does the sound of that Voice convey to us? Surely this: 'When He cometh into the world He saith, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.' Here is the purpose of the Incarnation as determined in the eternal councils of the Blessed Trinity. Here is expressed the whole purpose and intention of the life of the Incarnate Son of God. 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.' 'I came down from Heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me.'

As we follow Him, in thought, through His earthly life, we see this one central purpose and intention brought to bear upon all the details of His life. We see Him as a young lad in the Temple in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions; learning, that is as a youth, the truths of religion, and the laws of God, from God's authorised teachers. What a mystery of humility!—a mystery before which we can but bow in reverent and adoring wonder. We see His blessed Mother and Joseph coming to the Temple seeking Him, and finding Him there. We hear His Mother's question of earnest and wondering inquiry: 'Why hast Thou thus dealt with us?' And we hear His answer: 'Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?' Here is the purpose of His life declared in the training of that life. He must be about His Father's business—doing God's will. The general purpose and intention of His life, 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God,' is brought to bear upon the details of its training.

And then, as time goes on, and we see Him in the wilderness, in that marvellous scene of the Temptation, we hear His answer to the Tempter: 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word

that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' Here, again, is the general purpose of His life, 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God,' brought to bear upon the temptations of His life.

Later, as we follow Him on, we see Him in the midst of His earthly ministry, engrossed in all its labour of love, going about teaching, healing, and doing good. His answer to anxious and earnest inquiry was this: 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work;' and so once more we see here the general purpose of His life, 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God,' brought to bear upon the details of the work and activities of His life.

Following on the history of His life, we are permitted to enter with Him into the garden of Gethsemane, and to see Him, in His perfect human nature, sinlessly shrinking from the awful suffering of that mysterious agony, the foretaste of death, when 'His soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;' when there rested upon Him, the sinless One, the burden of the sins of the whole world accepted as His own, and 'His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.' And as we hear Him praying that if it were possible the cup might pass from Him, we hear Him also add to that prayer to His Father the further prayer of perfect and willing obedience, 'Not My will, but Thine be done.' And here, again, we see the general purpose of His life, 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God,' brought to bear upon the details of His suffering life, 'Not My will, but Thine be done.'

And in death the same purpose was manifested, when, with the satisfied cry of a perfected obedience, He said, 'It is finished!' and yielded up the ghost.

He had come to do the will of God, He had perfectly done the will of God, and now He gave back to God the human life which He had taken in which to do it.

‘Lo, I come to do thy will, O God’

‘It is finished.’

We see, then, that our blessed Lord’s life on earth, from beginning to end, in its intention, its training, its temptations, its activities, its sufferings, and its death, teaches this one great central lesson, that the will of God is something not merely to be passively submitted to, but something which must be actively done; that there must be active co-operation of the human will with the Divine will. This is the teaching of His life; this is holiness; this is the way of happiness.

Now we are persuaded that no one doubts that happiness would be the condition of such a life as this. No one doubts that, if the life of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ were really lived by anyone, happiness would be its result. To follow the example of Jesus Christ, then, must be the way to recover happiness.

We come therefore to this conclusion, that ‘to do the will of God is the true end for man to seek.’ And as in the case of the life of Jesus Christ, so in ours, there must be, first of all, this general intention and purpose of life, ‘Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.’ But it is not enough to have a general intention, unless that intention is constantly brought to bear upon the details of life.

Therefore in the training of our lives there must be this purpose; and this training goes on from the beginning to the end, does it not? We ever live and learn; the training of life lasts from the cradle to the grave, and there must be, throughout it all, the constant

effort to be about our Father's business ; we must be doing the will of God.

In the temptations of our lives there must be this purpose, and these temptations assail us from first to last. It is true that they may change somewhat in character as life goes on. The temptations of middle life may be of a different class from those of childhood, and those of old age may again differ from these, but still we are never free from temptations so long as life lasts, and in them all there must be the never-ceasing effort to do the will of God, and to resist them, as our Saviour did, with the answer, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'

In the activities of life—and these activities, in some form or other, do certainly last throughout the whole life—there must be the same thought, and the same purpose. 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work.'

And lastly, in the sufferings of life, there must be this purpose, and in one sense or another the whole of life is passed in the garden of Gethsemane. Life is never free from suffering of some kind—from the first breath that is drawn to the last sigh that sets the soul free—and in all these sufferings there must be the willing obedience that can say, 'Not my will, but Thine be done.' So only may we arrive at the blessedness of being able, when the end comes, to say in our measure and degree, 'It is finished !'

To do the will of God is the only true end, which it is our wisdom to choose and to seek, and the very first step towards doing the will of God is the resignation of our own will to His ; the submission, in all things, of the human will to the Divine.

Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to pray for grace to do this when He bids us say to our heavenly Father, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

Now to many no doubt this is a very hard saying. There are those who will be inclined to say: 'Surely it were unmanly to resign, to give up, my will entirely. To give up my will, to have no will of my own, would be to place myself in a condition of bondage and slavery. It would be to renounce my freedom; and unless I can, of course within certain limits, do as I like, say what I choose, and, at any rate, think what I please, life would hardly be worth the having.' And it is not only the young, not only the thoughtless, and the foolish, who are thus tempted, but we are all of us, at times, tempted to entertain some such thoughts. We are so anxious to get our own way, and to do as we please, that the submission of the will is by no means an easy thing. We are wonderfully like children, who will cry their little hearts out to get their own way, and then, having got it, weep still more bitterly when they find that it does not bring them what they hoped for and expected.

It is ever the story of the Prodigal Son over and over again, though, alas! it is not everyone who, like the Prodigal, at the last comes to himself.

No one ever yet succeeded in getting his own way, and, having got it, was satisfied with the result. There is always the aftermath of bitterness and disappointment; it may be of quicker or of more tardy growth, but, sooner or later, it does spring up most surely and most certainly.

But let us notice that to resign ourselves to the will of God is not to give up our own will, in the sense of slavishly renouncing its exercise; but, on the contrary, it

is the highest, the noblest, and the best exercise of the will.

Ah ! what a magnificent thing it is to have a will of one's own ! Yes, indeed it is !—a free will capable of choosing, and of choosing aright according to the dictates of conscience and the conclusions of reason ; capable of deliberate conscious acceptance of, and submission to, the will of God. The possession of this free will is the crowning gift of God. He has not made us mere machines endowed with life and intelligence, but He has added to all His other gifts this magnificent gift of a free will ; a gift awful in its magnificence, for by it we may set ourselves in opposition to God. By it we may deliberately take our stand on the side of evil, and bring destruction and unhappiness in our way. But it is also a gift very splendid in its power, for by it we may, even now, though in the past we may have opposed God, still turn to Him, submit ourselves to Him, accept and do His will ; we may take our stand deliberately on His side, we may do His will, and, doing it, do that which is irresistible, that which must succeed, that which must bring us security and peace here, and that which will certainly bring us perfect peace and happiness hereafter.

Consider well this one thought.

If I am doing God's will nothing can disturb me, and nothing else can concern me, nothing can trouble me. The world's opinion cannot affect me. To its praise and to its censure I shall be alike indifferent. If I am doing God's will, the success or the failure, as it may appear to me to be, of my action is not my concern—it rests with Him. My responsibility is limited to my obedience. The work is His, not mine. Even death itself is stripped of its terrors, for 'the sting of death is sin,' and 'sin is

the transgression of the law,' and therefore the sting of death is gone if I die doing God's will.

There can be no grander, no safer, position than that of the soul which is actively engaged in doing the will of God.

Granted, then, that we are ready and willing to surrender our own wills to that of God; granted that we accept this as the purpose of our life, 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God;' still there are certain difficulties which we have to face, and in the main they will be found to resolve themselves into these two: First, how am I to know what the will of God is? for in order that I may do it, I must first know what it is. And secondly, when I do know what the will of God is, how am I to do it?

We need, then, first knowledge as to the will of God, and then the power wherein to do it.

III.

*THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL NEEDED
IN ORDER TO REGAIN HAPPINESS.*

‘ Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? ’—ACTS ix. 6.

WE have accepted as our definition of happiness that it is ‘ the satisfaction experienced by the sentient being in the possession, and in the exercise, of perfectly healthful life.’

Happiness has been lost by sin. ‘ Sin is the transgression of the law,’ and every breach of law is necessarily followed by disease, whether physical, moral, or spiritual. The only way, then, in which we may regain happiness, which is to be found only in healthful life, is by obeying the laws of God.

To do the will of God is the only true end for man to seek. This must be the intention and purpose of our life, ‘ Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.’ This general purpose of life is to be brought to bear in all the details of the training, the temptations, the activities, and the sufferings of our daily lives. And to this end the first step is the submission of the human will to the Divine will.

Granted, then, that we are ready to do this ; granted that we are ready to submit our own wills to that of God ; granted that we desire with a deliberate, earnest,

and firm determination to do God's will : there are still difficulties which we have to face.

And they are no merely imaginary difficulties ; it is true that they are often very much exaggerated—and they always will be exaggerated where there is any hesitation, or any holding back, in the full resignation of the will—but even when not so exaggerated, even in the case of the most earnest-minded and devout, in the case of those who are most firmly determined to do the will of God, these difficulties are often very real, and very perplexing.

Let us think about these difficulties, and try to see how they may be removed.

The first difficulty will probably be just that which met Saul of Tarsus when, having been overwhelmed by the heavenly vision, as he journeyed to Damascus, he had heard the converting question, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?' The moment he heard the Saviour's voice his final resolution was taken. He gave up his will entirely to do that of God, and in his submission he cried, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' Here was the difficulty plainly expressed. How was he to know what God's will for him was? He was ready and willing to do it ; without the slightest reservation he yielded up his will. That glorious zeal of his should henceforth be exercised in accordance with the will of God. But how was he to know what God would have him do? So he gave expression to the desire of his heart, as he uttered his prayer, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?'

Now we believe that just this same difficulty often presents itself, with great force and reality, to many an anxious and earnest soul. 'Lord, what wilt Thou have

me to do?' 'How am I to know what the will of God for me is?' There are so many conflicting influences asserting their power over my life. I am drawn hither and thither. There are times when duties appear to be so conflicting, and so contradictory, that it is impossible for me to determine which to choose. And then, too, it is not only in the matter of duty and practice that the difficulty presents itself, but in matters of faith also. I desire to believe what is true, as well as to do what is right. But there are so many teachers, so many voices, so many views on faith as well as on morals, that it seems to be not only difficult, but almost impossible, for me to know, with any degree of certainty, what it is God's will that I should believe, and do. And in my perplexity I cry to God with Saul of Tarsus, and say, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' I need, and I earnestly desire, some voice which shall tell me clearly and distinctly what is God's will for me, in all the perplexing circumstances of my life, in order that I may, so far as I possibly can, do it.

Now there is much truth in all this ; we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that there is here a great difficulty pressing very heavily upon the earnest and devout soul. But, after all, it is only what might be expected ; for we may take it as certain that the world, and the flesh, and the devil, the three great enemies of the soul, will do all that they possibly can to place obstacles in our way, and to deaden the ear, and obscure the vision, of him who is striving his best to hear, and to see, what God's will is. The difficulty enters very largely into the question of the battle which we have to fight. But great as it is, it is not insurmountable.

We naturally, then, go on to ask, Are there any rules

which will infallibly lead us to know what the will of God is? And our answer is, Yes, there are such rules, but it must be remembered that they will only lead to this result provided that they be implicitly, and honestly, followed.

What are these rules? Here are some of them.

St. Paul gives us this as a rule whereby we may know the will of God. He says: 'This is the will of God, even your sanctification.' What is sanctification? 'Sanctification is the progress, development, and perfection of the spiritual life in conformity to the will of God.' Sanctification is the especial work of God the Holy Ghost, the giver of life. The life of sanctification is first imparted to us in Holy Baptism, when we are made 'members of Christ, the children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.' That life is strengthened by the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Ghost conveyed to us in Confirmation, 'the spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness, and the spirit of holy fear.'

These sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit will produce in the soul three effects, which are the internal evidences of sanctification, viz. the quickening of the conscience, the enlightening of the understanding, and the strengthening of the will. Here, then, are the internal evidences of sanctification by which we may test ourselves. Are we becoming, day by day, more sensitive to sin, and so more watchful against temptation? Is the conscience being quickened? Are we more and more pained by sin, more grieved and shocked by it? Is the understanding being enlightened? Do we see more clearly, as time goes on, in spiritual things; and are we

more on the watch to perceive God's dealings with us in all things? Is the will being strengthened? Are we daily growing stronger in will, more determined, that is, in the submission of our own will to that of God? are we more brave in obeying conscience, and stronger in resisting temptation? are we more earnest in our prayers? more thorough in our repentance, and more devout in the discharge of all the duties of religion? Through these internal evidences of sanctification we may learn whether or no we are doing the will of God. If without any doubt, or any self-deception, we can honestly feel these things within ourselves, we may thank God and take courage.

But, then, too, these internal effects of the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Ghost must have their results manifested in the outer life. Sanctification must make itself seen—it cannot altogether be hid. The fruit of the Spirit will be seen, though the power that produces it, and the working of that power, be secret and hidden; just as the fruit of a tree is seen, though the power that causes the fruit to grow, and to ripen, and the working of that power are invisible. Our blessed Lord surely teaches this when He says of men, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' The fruit of the Spirit, where it exists, will always, in a greater or less degree, be manifested in the life as it is seen by others. There are twelve of these outward fruits, or evidences, of sanctification, viz. love, joy, peace, long-suffering, mercy, patience, goodness, faith, meekness, modesty, sobriety, and chastity.

It is God's will that these fruits should be borne in our daily lives. 'Herein is My Father glorified if ye bear much fruit.'

Now if we bear in mind that man's duty has a three-

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fold direction, viz. his duty to God, his duty to his neighbour, and his duty to himself, we notice at once that these fruits divide themselves into three groups, each of which is specially borne in one or other of these directions of duty. St. Paul speaking of these fruits, in the Epistle to the Galatians, sums them up under nine heads, viz. love, joy, peace; long-suffering, gentleness, goodness; faith, meekness, temperance. He uses the word 'gentleness' to express mercy and patience, and he groups together modesty, sobriety, and chastity under the one head of temperance. They are, perhaps, most easily remembered in St. Paul's own words, where it may be noticed that they are classed in three little groups, each group containing three, exactly corresponding to the three directions of duty.

How gentle, how lovely, and how beautiful is that life in which these fruits borne to the glory of God are thus manifested!

Love, joy, peace, in duty to God—the love of God standing first and ruling all the rest. Ah! if I love God above all things, there will be a joy of heart that nothing else can give, and from that joy there will flow into my soul a peace, the peace of God which passeth understanding; and so there will be love, joy, peace, in my life in its relation to God.

Long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, in duty to man—long-suffering characterising all my dealings with my neighbour; gentleness, or, as the word means, mercy and patience, in all my thoughts, words, and deeds; goodness, that lovely thing which no other word describes, that sweet combination of love, and purity, and justice, and reality of character that makes me the true friend, the friend to be loved and trusted; and thus there

will be long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, in my life in its relation to my neighbour.

And lastly, faith, meekness, temperance in duty to self—that is to say, self-control in all things. Faith, or self-control as regards all my intellectual powers, subordinating them all to the truths of revelation ; ‘bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ ;’ meekness, or self-control in the exercise of the affections ; temperance, or self-control as regards all the instincts, appetites, and passions of my nature, confining their exercise within the limits of God’s law.

That is God’s will for us, ‘even our sanctification,’ that in our lives there should be exhibited these fruits of righteousness.

We notice, then, that here we have a rule by which we may know God’s will. Everything that tends to help on this life of sanctification is God’s will for us ; everything that tends to mar it, or to hinder it, is not God’s will for us.

If I find, then, that any circumstance of life—a companion, a friend, a habit, a work or calling, a pursuit or amusement, a book or whatever it may be—is in any way checking my growth in grace, hindering my sanctification ; if any such thing is leading me away from God, no matter how slightly ; if it cause me to view sin less seriously, or to seek God’s glory less earnestly ; if its influence is to make me less earnest in prayer, less reverent in devotion, less searching in my self-examination, or less regular in the discharge of any religious duty, then I may be certain that the will of God for me is that I should give it up—have nothing more whatever to do with it—and that if I still cling to that thing, what-

ever it may be, I shall be doing my own will, and not God's.

Now we go on in the next place to notice that there is the will of God distinctly laid down for us in His revealed Word. Nothing can be more concise, more distinct, or more definite, than the Ten Commandments, and therein is contained the will of God as regards man's duty.

We have already said that our blessed Lord's teaching is, above all things, practical teaching. Especially is this to be noticed in His teaching on this very question of duty. Again and again we find Him referring His hearers to the written law of God, that is to say, to the Ten Commandments, as the rule of life.

There is that wonderfully touching case of the rich young man of whom it is said that 'Jesus beholding him loved him'; that young man who had such great gifts and such splendid opportunities, who coming to Jesus asked Him, 'Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?' The answer was, 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments.' But this answer was not enough for him, and so he inquired further, 'Which?' and he was again referred back to the written law. Just the Ten Commandments. But this seemed too simple, and too commonplace, for him, and he said, 'All these things have I kept from my youth up;'—surely there must be something more that Thou hast for me to do—'What lack I yet?'

Had he kept all the Commandments from his youth up? It may have been that he had kept them in a certain sort of way, without any very gross breach of any one of them in the letter. But had he kept them in the fulness of their spirit? Had he perfectly loved

God above all things, and his neighbour as himself? Oh no; and so he received the further answer: 'One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the Cross, and follow Me.' And then, alas! he turned, and 'went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.' His attention was drawn to the full meaning of these Ten Commandments, which taught him to love God above all things, and his neighbour as himself. He saw that he had not kept them; he felt that he did not mean to keep them, in this sense; but he could not say that he did not know what the will of God for him was.

Alas! there are many now who are wonderfully like that rich young man. They have known the Commandments since their childhood; they have been taught to accept them, and they have accepted them as the moral rule of life; and having observed them in a general sort of way, avoiding any gross breach of them in the letter, they take it for granted, so to speak, that they have always kept them. Then some event in life occurs, and by it they are for the moment touched; they look upon life in a more serious light than they have hitherto done. Eternal life for the moment stands out before them as the one thing to be desired and obtained; and they ask in all sincerity at the time, 'What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' And then when the answer is given, 'Keep the Commandments'—just these Ten Commandments—in the fulness of their meaning and spirit, this seems too commonplace for them. It does not satisfy them; they have known this all along. They expected something else to be given them to do—some great thing outside the ordinary routine of daily life.

But when this great thing, which they profess to be ready to do, resolves itself into the mere fuller obedience to the Ten Commandments, too often, alas! they, also, turn away.

Once more, the same kind of lesson is taught by our blessed Lord's answer to the lawyer who asked Him, 'Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' Our Lord's answer was, 'What is written in the law? how readest thou?' The inquirer was referred back to God's law as already revealed, and the lawyer was made to show that he did know what was commanded. Then our blessed Lord added: 'Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live.'

Or again, if we take another case, that of the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus as spoken by our Saviour, we have the same lesson enforced. As the veil that hides the unseen world is there for a moment drawn aside, the rich man is represented to us as praying Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brethren, and the answer is, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' They have in the revealed Word of God a knowledge of what His will is; let them do it.

Nothing can possibly be more practical than this teaching. Let us lay it to heart. The will of God for us is laid down in the Ten Commandments; it is for us to do it.

But now we go on to notice that Almighty God, in His great mercy and love, has given to us some further way of finding out fully what His will is. And in certain respects it is true that the really earnest inquirer after His will does often need some explanation of the written Word. This, we think, is shown in the case of St. Paul, who, when he cried, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have

me to do?' was seeking for the knowledge of God's will in a far higher, and better, sense than did either the rich young man or the lawyer.

St. Paul was at this time journeying from Jerusalem to Damascus with a view to carrying on the persecution of the Christians. He had been brought up in the strictest school of the Pharisees; he knew what was written in the law; and according to his light he had, beyond all question, striven his best to obey God's will. It was in no boastful spirit, but in conscious statement of the truth, that he afterwards referred to that part of his life preceding his conversion, and declared that he had been 'taught according to the perfect manner of the Law of the Fathers, and was zealous toward God,' and that he had been 'as touching the righteousness that is by the law, blameless.' And he was now engaged in what he conceived to be his duty in upholding the very first Commandment, 'Thou shalt have none other gods but Me.' He was doing his best to check and to destroy what he then believed to be a false worship which others were beginning to teach.

Suddenly there burst upon him the heavenly vision; blinded by its brightness he fell to the ground. He heard the voice of Jesus calling to him and saying, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?' In wonder he cried, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' and the answer came, 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.' Ah! there had been many pricks of conscience bringing him up to this scene. He was not the lawless, the godless, the thoughtless persecutor. He had thought it all over, he had weighed the matter well; again and again doubts had suggested themselves to him, compelling him to examine his position, and to ask

himself whether he were really right. The moral beauty of St. Stephen's martyrdom, of which he had been a witness; the sad face of his friend St. Barnabas after that martyrdom; the words of warning spoken by his own guide and master, Gamaliel; the marvellous accounts of the life of Jesus which had reached him—all these things had brought him pricks of conscience which he must have found it hard to resist; but having weighed it all he still thought himself right, and had determined to carry on his work of persecution. But now all was changed with him; he surrendered himself absolutely to the will of God and cried, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?'

Now, that which follows is very remarkable and deserves special attention. Our blessed Lord does not tell him all that he is to do. He tells him to take one step, and that step is the one which will place him in the way of obtaining the knowledge he seeks.

Our Lord Jesus Christ had established on earth His Church; He had sent forth that Church with the Divine commission to teach all nations. God the Holy Ghost had come to dwell in, and with, that Church to teach her, and to guide her into all truth. To teach men the will of God was, then, the function of the Church of Christ. That duty of instructing men our blessed Lord leaves, therefore, to the Church to perform, and so He refers St. Paul to that Church for the instruction he needs. 'Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.' He obeyed, and Ananias was sent to him, as elsewhere St. Peter was sent to Cornelius, as the duly authorised and faithful teacher, and interpreter, of the Divine will. God, then, does speak to men through the Church. It is for us to listen

to her voice if, when we are in doubt, we would know what the will of God is.

There are yet one or two minor tests whereby we may know the will of God. 'In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.' Here is a test. Whatever we may be doing, if we can really and honestly, as in the sight of God, remembering the account we must give, thank Him that we are doing it, that we are able to do it, that He has given it to us to do, and that by doing it we are glorifying Him, then we may be certain that it is in accordance with His will that we should do it.

Again, there is this test, which in many ways is a safe one. If we are in doubt as to which of two apparently conflicting duties we should do, let us ask ourselves this question, 'Which of these duties is the more pleasing to me?' For the most part the other will be the one which God would have us choose.

We are not left in such ignorance of what God's will is as we sometimes imagine. There are at any rate these rules whereby we may know what the will of God is, and it is for us to follow them honestly.

IV.

*THE POWER NEEDED IN ORDER TO
REGAIN HAPPINESS.*

‘This do, and thou shalt live.’—ST. LUKE x. 28.

HAVING arrived at a firm determination to submit our wills to that of God and to obey Him in all things, there are yet two difficulties which meet us.

First, that of ascertaining what God would have us do.

Secondly, that of obtaining the power wherein to do His will when we have ascertained what it is.

Perhaps the first of these difficulties is the one which is the more readily admitted, while the other is the less generally acknowledged ; though, as a matter of fact, we do know to a great extent what God’s will is, but we have not of ourselves the power to do it.

We have already pointed out some of the rules whereby to know God’s will. We find it in whatever tends to our sanctification, in the Ten Commandments, in the voice of the Church, in the voice of conscience.

But granted that we know God’s will, there comes the question of how we are to do it. We need power, power which shall be great enough to overcome all the

difficulties which the enemies of our souls will place in our way. We cannot of ourselves do God's will even when we know what it is. But yet of this we may be certain, that He never requires of us what we cannot perform, and therefore the power we need is to be obtained. Knowledge is not of itself sufficient, for certainly in this matter knowledge is not power, and there is nothing strange here—it is just what is to be expected.

The analogy between natural and spiritual things is very close. The laws which govern the kingdom of nature run on lines very parallel to those which rule in the kingdom of grace. In both nature and grace, theory and practice are always distinct things. In some cases the theory may be exceedingly simple and the practice very difficult ; in other cases theory, and knowledge of theory, may be very difficult and intricate, but the practice may be very simple and easy ; but in all cases theory and knowledge of theory have to be reduced to practice, and for the most part this is done by the careful observance of some very simple rules.

Now, in all the workings of nature there is some hidden, secret, and mysterious power which may be set in motion and utilised by the observance of some simple rules. Knowledge of the theory is a good thing, but knowledge of the rules whereby the theory is reduced to practice is absolutely necessary if the power is to be utilised. Observation and experience, research and science, may teach us much about the power and how it works ; but, however great may be the knowledge which we may thus acquire, it will not of itself set that power in motion.

For instance, there is the growth of the body, a very

wonderful and mysterious thing. Science may teach a great deal very accurately concerning all the various elements of which the body is composed ; it may explain how light, air, and food are necessary to the growth of the body ; it may point out the laws whereby food is assimilated, and define with accuracy the various kinds of nutriment which most go to make bone, brain, or muscle. But after all the body does not grow unless the simple rules of eating and drinking, and so forth, are followed.

There is the growth of the seed ; we may have great botanical knowledge, we may know much as to the conditions under which this or that seed will grow ; but the germinating of the seed, and the growth of the plant, will not take place unless the simple rules of preparing the ground and sowing the seed be observed.

I have a gas-jet in my room ; I may be well versed in the theory of chemistry, I may be able to explain all the theory of making the gas, all the chemical properties of the gas ; but in order to obtain the light, which I need, I must turn the tap and apply a light to the gas.

All the marvellous appliances with which science has supplied us in this wonderful nineteenth century—this age in which all such matters have advanced with giant strides—illustrate the same truth. The steam engine, the electric telegraph, the telephone, and all the rest of them—there is in them all the secret, unseen, mysterious power ; and all knowledge that can be obtained as to that power, and as to the working of that power, is good ; but after all, as a matter of practice, the power is brought into play and utilised by the observance of simple rules.

The farmer knows that he cannot of himself make the corn to grow and to ripen, and thus produce the harvest ; but he also knows that he can do something to set in motion, for his good, the secret powers that do make the corn to grow and to ripen, and so produce the harvest, and he does it : he prepares the ground, he sows the seed, he weeds and cleans the growing corn ; and the harvest is the result of that which he can and does do, and that which the secret power, which by his act has been brought to bear upon the seed, alone can do.

The engine-driver knows perfectly well that in his own strength alone he cannot possibly move his train ; but he also knows, equally well, that by his own strength he can do that which will set in motion and apply the hidden power in his engine that can and will move his train ; he knows that that power can, and will, be set in motion by a very simple act on his part, by the turning of a wheel, or by the lifting or lowering of a lever, or whatever it may be ; and he does that which he can do, and the train moves on ; and the moving of the train has after all been his work, so far as this, that he, by his act, applied the hidden power to that which he wanted to have accomplished.

Now what is all this but a parable setting forth what goes on in spiritual things ?

In the spiritual life, too, there is the secret, hidden, mysterious power. But, though secret and hidden, it is none the less real, and it is sufficient to do that which we desire to do, but which of ourselves we are insufficient to do without it, viz. the will of God.

That secret, hidden, mysterious power is grace.

What is grace ? ' Grace is the supernatural gift of God

freely bestowed upon us, through Jesus Christ, for our sanctification and our salvation.' That is grace. Now all the knowledge we can possibly obtain as to this power, and as to the working of this power, is good. Faith in this power is absolutely necessary ; and with it we are able to do that which without it we could not do. All difficulties disappear before it. St. Paul says, 'I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me,' but in order that this power may be set in motion for our good, and utilised for the purpose of enabling us to do the will of God, certain simple rules must be observed.

Let us now consider some of these rules laid down for us by our blessed Lord Jesus Christ Himself. They are marvellously simple, the youngest can understand them ; they are strangely easy, the feeblest can observe them ; they are wonderfully clear and distinct, no one can misunderstand them.

First, then, there is this rule :

'Ask, and ye shall have ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' How beautifully simple this is, it is almost monosyllabic. How wonderfully is the love of the blessed Saviour revealed in all things ! Even here, as He tells us how to obtain what we need, He does it in words that all can understand—the ignorant, the dull, and the youngest child, all are taught with the same care as the learned, the brilliant, and the most matured intellect.

Here, then, is the plain direction : We are to ask, that is to say, we are to pray. And here also is the promise given, that in answer to prayer we shall receive the grace we need.

It would, then, be the utmost folly for any of us to

say, 'I cannot do this or that,' and to remain idle when we can, at any rate, do this thing which we are bid to do, 'ask.' We can certainly do that. We can ask, we can seek, we can knock—that is to say, we can pray—and so set that grace in motion, obtain it, and apply it, to do that which without it we could not do, but which with it we can perform. If, knowing that we can obtain help, and knowing how to obtain it, we neglected to observe the rule, our action would be parallel to that of the engine-driver, who, because of his own strength he could not move his train, therefore remained idle, keeping it at a standstill, while he knew perfectly well that he could move the lever which would set in motion the power which would move the train. Such action would be not only foolish, but distinctly culpable.

We are, then, bid to pray and we can pray.

What is prayer? 'Prayer is the lifting up my heart and soul to God, telling Him what I want and asking Him to grant it.' That is prayer. Now we notice here that there is nothing selfish in true prayer. Prayer is not merely asking God for what I want: it is much more than that. It is the lifting up my heart and soul to Him; it is entering into communion or converse with Him; and, moreover, it is an act of obedience and of gratitude, for we are told to ask, and we are told how to ask; we are taught the very words in which to ask, and therefore not to ask were disobedience and ingratitude, which of all things are the most selfish. There is nothing selfish in true prayer.

To pray is necessarily to acknowledge three great truths, viz. the existence of the supernatural, our own insufficiency, and our need of God.

Now there are those who do not pray because they

do not, or at any rate they profess that they do not, acknowledge these truths.

But no matter how much a man may try to persuade himself that he does not acknowledge the existence of the supernatural, we maintain that, as a matter of fact, he does acknowledge it every day of his life. Man's life is surrounded by mysteries which he cannot explain, and his thoughts, words, and deeds do, day by day, in spite of himself, either directly or indirectly, acknowledge the existence of the supernatural, for his actions, his words, and his calculations are based on the acceptance of these mysteries.

Again, conscience is perpetually acknowledging the supernatural. Tell a man, for instance, that he has no conscience: he will at once, and rightly, indignantly deny your right to make that statement; he will confidently and truly assert that he has a conscience, and he will go further and declare that he acts according to its dictates. Very well, but now let us consider what that conscience is which he claims to have; what is it but something within him which is constantly appealing to some power and authority which is greater and higher than himself, and which he knows that he is bound to acknowledge and ought to obey? What is that higher power and authority? Any other man? Certainly not. The State? No, for he will often, and indeed for the most part, find his conscience speaking on questions with which the State has nothing whatever to do. Is it public opinion? Surely not, for if he obey public opinion he will find himself very often disobeying his conscience, and if he obey his conscience he will not infrequently find himself running counter to public opinion.

Conscience can exercise its empire over man only in so far as it is to him the recognised organ and interpreter of some power higher than himself, which he is bound to respect, and that power is supernatural. Remove the idea of the supernatural, eliminate the thought of God, and conscience ceases to have any empire over man. It must be so. The conscience then becomes, in so far as it remains at all, only a superstitious prejudice, which it would be the legitimate object of reason to sweep away. But reason does not do this ; on the contrary, reason bids man obey his conscience ; and, obeying it, man does acknowledge the existence of the supernatural.

As to the second point, we are quite willing to admit, that, if we were sufficient of ourselves to do the will of God, if we could do it without help, it would be immoral to ask for help. To ask for help to do that which we can do ourselves is to pauperise our moral nature. But we are not sufficient of ourselves. It is impossible in all our experience to find anyone, or to point to anyone, who is, or who ever has been, able, apart from the grace of God, to do His will in all things.

As we look at Holy Scripture we note the pitiless veracity with which it records the sins, the failings, and the shortcomings, of even the greatest of the saints of God.

Noah, the faithful, the preacher of righteousness, fell into drunkenness. Abraham, 'the friend of God,' is recorded as having been untruthful. Jacob, with all his marvellously clear spiritual perceptions, deceived his father. Moses, the meekest of men, once lost his temper. David, 'the man after God's own heart,' committed adultery and murder. St. Peter denied his Lord. All

the disciples forsook Jesus and fled. And so it is all the way through the Bible : the faults of the saints, as well as their virtues, are recorded. Had the Word of God described perfect saints without fault, blot, or blemish, it would have set before us beings so unlike ourselves that we should have felt that they belonged to some other race altogether. But in its perfect truthfulness it describes saintly men sustained by grace, and it shows how they failed—not because of the insufficiency of grace, but because, from time to time, they either forgot to seek it or neglected to use it. And thus it puts before us some of that evidence which was before the Almighty when He looked down from heaven and beheld all the children of men, and saw that ‘there was none good ; no, not one.’

We are not ‘sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves ; but our sufficiency is of God.’

We have need of God. None other can help us as we need to be helped. ‘Ask, and ye shall have.’

Prayer, then, is the way in which to seek for grace ; but God has also appointed channels through which to convey to us the grace we ask for.

He gives grace, thanks be to Him, in innumerable ways, in many secret ways ; in ways differing, no doubt, in almost every case. The mysteries and the intricacies of the great work of sanctification which God the Holy Ghost carries on in the souls of men are innumerable. But there are certain means of obtaining grace, which God has appointed in His Church, which are open to all and within the reach of all who will use them. They are the Sacraments of the Church

Here, then, is our next rule for obtaining grace.

Use the Sacraments.

Our blessed Lord Jesus Christ in the early part of His ministry told Nicodemus that 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' And when, just before the Ascension, He gave to the Church her great commission, He pointed out how men were to be born of water and of the Spirit, as He bade His Church go forth into all the world and 'teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'

Here, then, is the rule for obtaining that spiritual life which is supernaturally imparted. We must seek it in Holy Baptism.

During the great forty days which elapsed between the Resurrection and the Ascension our blessed Lord constantly appeared to His disciples, teaching them and 'speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.' That is to say, those things which were to be done and practised in the Church of God.

After His Ascension the disciples returned to Jerusalem to wait for the gift of God the Holy Ghost, in whose power the Church was to do her work. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Ghost came down upon His Church, giving her that supernatural power. And then immediately we find the Church doing those things which had been commanded.

On the dispersion of the Christians from Jerusalem after the martyrdom of St. Stephen, St. Philip and others went to Samaria, where they made converts and baptized them. St. Peter and St. John being informed of this then went down to Samaria, and laid their hands on those that had been baptized, that they might receive the Holy Ghost.

Here, then, we have the next rule: if we would have the life which is supernaturally imparted in Holy Baptism strengthened, we must seek the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Ghost which are given in Confirmation.

Once more we go on to notice that our blessed Lord during His ministry said to His disciples: 'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.' 'Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.' 'He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him. As the Living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.' And on the night of His betrayal He taught how men were to eat His flesh and drink His blood. He instituted the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood, and He gave this as a perpetual direction to be obeyed by His Church till He should come again: 'This do in remembrance of Me.'

No direction can possibly be plainer. Here in the Blessed Sacrament we have the memorial to be continually made before God, in which the merits of the Passion, and Death, of His only-begotten Son for the sins of the whole world, are to be perpetually pleaded by the Church on earth.

He said: 'Take, eat; this is My body.'

Nothing can be more distinct. Here in this Blessed Sacrament we have the mode in which His Body and His Blood are to be the spiritual food and sustenance of our souls.

He has said: 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches.' 'Abide in Me, and I in you.' 'Because I live, ye shall live also.' 'He that abideth in Me, and I

in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit ; for without Me ye can do nothing.' ' Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.'

The spiritual life supernaturally imparted in Holy Baptism when we are grafted into Christ ; strengthened by the gifts of the Holy Ghost in Confirmation, and in numberless other ways ; maintained by constant Communion ; having love as its ruling power, faith as its motive principle, and suffering as its condition of development ; and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness : that is the life that glorifies God.

Some years afterwards we have St. Paul in his Epistles carrying on this same teaching.

' As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come.' Here is the memorial perpetually made, the great sacrifice continually pleaded.

' The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ ? ' ' The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the Body of Christ ? ' Here is the means whereby the Body and Blood of Christ are conveyed as the soul's food.

The Church has ever taught the same truths.

' The Lord's Supper was ordained for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the Death of Christ, and of the benefits which we receive thereby.' Here is the memorial to be continually presented, and the sacrifice pleaded.

The benefits received by the soul in Holy Communion are, ' the strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the Body and Blood of Christ.'

Here, then, we have another plain rule for obtaining the power we need in order to regain happiness. If we

would have the spiritual life maintained we must be diligent in attendance at the Blessed Sacrament.

Now it may be said, and probably will be said, by some : ' All this is very simple, and somewhat commonplace ; we have heard it all our lives.' Quite so ; we intended it all to be simple. Quite true, we have heard it all our lives. What we wished to illustrate was just this : that theory is to be reduced to practice by the observance of simple rules. The secret, hidden power which enables us to do that which without it we could not do is always put in motion, applied, and utilised by the observance of simple rules.

The saints have had nothing more than we have. The saints had the same Sacraments and the same means of grace that we have ; they had the same rules for their guidance that we have ; and they became saints by following those rules.

It does not need great learning or great brilliancy, great position or much knowledge, to become a saint. Saints are made by the seeking, and by the using, of God's grace as He would have it sought and used.

V.

*THE BLESSEDNESS OF HAPPINESS
REGAINED.*

‘O well is thee, and happy shalt thou be.’—PSALM cxxviii. 2.

WE shall, probably, find it useful if we now try to gather up briefly the principal points which we have been dwelling upon in what we have said on this subject of happiness.

We have seen, then, that we were created by God, who is love. Loving us, the creatures whom He had made, He necessarily designed our happiness, and therefore in creating us He made us fitted for, and capable of, happiness throughout all the powers of our complex nature—body, soul, and spirit. The love of God designed our happiness, but that love was not exhausted in creation ; man having lost happiness, the love of God still followed him, for God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son to die for it ; and even that did not exhaust the everlasting love of the Three in One. For God the Holy Ghost even now, energising through His Church, carries on the great work of sanctification in the souls of men to bring about their happiness.

We accepted this as our definition of happiness, that it is ‘the satisfaction experienced by the sentient being

in the possession, and in the exercise, of perfectly healthful life.¹

And we saw how that definition satisfies the conception which we are able to form of the happiness of God Himself, of the happiness of the angels, of happiness as it exists in the animal world, and of the happiness of man, whether in body, soul, or spirit.

That man has lost this happiness for which he was created is a fact which forces itself upon our attention whether we will or no. He is no longer in possession of that perfectly healthful life, either physical, moral, or spiritual, which is necessary to his happiness. Look where we will, we see disease of body, soul, or spirit in some degree or other; and consequently we see unhappiness in proportion as there is absence of healthful life.

But the heart of man is everywhere and always longing to regain this lost happiness; and it is right that we should all seek it, for all were created for it.

It is sought in all kinds of ways, often amiss, sometimes foolishly, sometimes even in those very things through which it was lost, viz. self-will, self-seeking pleasure, and in the gratification of the senses, appetites, and passions of the lower nature. But even the more reasonable, true, wise, and serious ways of seeking it, apart from religion, all fail somewhere. Science, philosophy, politics, philanthropic effort, can all do something towards the recovery of happiness; but of themselves they are not sufficient.

Happiness can only be found in God, and it can only be regained through the spiritual life; that is to say, through 'life lived in union with Jesus Christ.'

Now, at the outset, in the matter of the true seeking

to regain happiness it is necessary to realise clearly how it has been lost.

It has been lost by sin. 'Sin is the transgression of the law,' and every breach of law inevitably brings its punishment. Sin has its seat in the will of the creature ; it is the alienation of the will of the creature from that of the Creator, and therefore rebellion against the laws of the Creator.

Man's higher will rebelled against the will of God, and in its turn lost its empire over the lower will, and that again ceased to control the appetites and the passions ; and thus, transgressing God's law throughout the whole of his being, man lost, in body, soul, and spirit, his condition of healthful life, and unhappiness became his lot.

Happiness is to be found in God alone, and it can be regained in the spiritual life by the exercise of wisdom. 'Happy is the man that findeth wisdom.' Let us remember that wisdom is not merely knowledge, or learning, or great intellectual development. Wisdom, thank God, is something that is within the reach of all ; it is within the reach of the most ignorant, of the most unlearned, and of the dullest. 'Wisdom' is simply 'the choosing the right end, and using the right means of attaining it.'

If, then, we would regain happiness, the first thing for us to do, after realising that man, by choosing that which was not the right end of life, lost it, is to choose the right and true end of life.

What is that? To do the will of God. That is the only true end for man to seek.

This is the great lesson that stands in the very forefront of the teaching of the life of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

‘Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God,’ was the general and eternally declared purpose of His life.

‘Wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?’ was the one object in the training of His human life.

‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,’ expressed the spirit in which all the temptations of His life were met.

‘My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work,’ was the principle upon which the activities of His life were carried out.

‘Not My will, but Thine, be done,’ was the spirit in which the sufferings of His life were borne.

He came to do the will of the Father. He did it perfectly, and, dying, He said, ‘It is finished.’

At the outset, then, in the search after happiness, we must realise that it has been lost by sin.

The first step in the effort to regain it is to choose the will of God as the end of life ; and in order to do the will of God there must be entire subjection of the human will to the Divine.

Then, having determined to do this, there comes the question of how we are to know what the will of God is.

As to this, He speaks to us first through conscience and experience.

‘This is the will of God, even your sanctification.’ Everything that tends to the growth, development, and perfection of the spiritual life is His will.

‘In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.’ Here, again, conscience and experience must speak.

God also declares His will to us in His revealed

Word, in His declared laws. 'What is written in the Law? How readeest thou?' 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments.'

And He teaches us through the voice of His Church : 'Go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.'

Here are the ways, then, in which God reveals His will to us. Through the voice of conscience, and through experience interpreted by conscience. Through the voice of revelation in His written Word, and through the voice of the Church.

There next comes the question of how, when we know God's will, we are to do it. We need power, for of ourselves we cannot do it. The first part of true wisdom is 'to choose the right end'; that is, as we have seen, 'to do the will of God.' The second part of true wisdom is, 'to use the right means of attaining it.'

Now we noticed that in the kingdom of nature there is always some secret, hidden, and mysterious, but real power by the use of which we are able to do that which without it we could not do, and that this power is always to be set in motion, and utilised, by the observance of some plain and simple rules.

So it is also in the kingdom of grace, in the spiritual world. There the secret, hidden and mysterious, though real and living, power is the grace of God. 'Grace is the supernatural gift of God, freely bestowed upon us through Jesus Christ for our sanctification and our salvation.'

This power is to be obtained, set in motion, and utilised for our assistance by the observance of plain and simple rules. These rules have been clearly laid down for us by our blessed Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

‘Ask, and ye shall have ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.’ We are to pray for grace.

‘This do in remembrance of Me.’

We are to be diligent in attendance at the Blessed Sacrament, and also in the use of all the means of grace.

The rules are plain and simple, and by observing them faithfully, and diligently, grace is obtained and the power to do God’s will is given.

We do not for a moment imply that God gives grace in no other way, or that His help can only be obtained or bestowed thus. Ah, no ; we believe, and we know, that He works in innumerable ways and through all kinds of agencies, as He in His infinite love, mercy, wisdom, power, and justice, sees fit. But here are His plain rules—rules which everyone can obey if he will—and therefore no man has a right to say, ‘I cannot do God’s will,’ for he can, in any case, do it in these things and so seek, and obtain, the help he needs to do that which without it he could not perform.

This is the sum and substance of what we have been saying.

We were created to be happy ; we were redeemed that happiness might be restored to us ; we are sanctified that we may regain happiness. Happiness was lost by sin, by the alienation of the human will from that of the Créator. We must, in order to regain it, ‘choose the will of God as the end of life.’ We must promote the glory of God by doing that will. To do this there must be the highest exercise of our own will, viz. the submitting it to God’s. His will is made plain to us, and the power to do it is offered to us, if we will seek it and use it. And God’s will done by us, healthful life will be restored

and happiness will ensue—happiness in part here on earth, ending in perfect happiness hereafter, when in the possession and in the exercise of perfectly healthful life, in the body ‘raised incorruptible,’ in the soul restored ‘in power,’ and in the spirit endowed with ‘glory,’ ‘we shall see the King in His beauty, and behold the land that is very far off.’

We repeat once more our statement that happiness is to be found in God alone, and that it is to be regained in the spiritual life; that is, in the ordinary daily life lived in union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Not, let us remember, merely in a life of imitation of Jesus Christ—that it will be, that it must be, beyond all question; we must follow His steps, we must strive to be like Him, we must imitate Him and copy Him, for He has set us the only example of life which, if faithfully followed, will never lead us astray in any one detail. But this can only be done in a life of real living union with Him; it can be done only in so far as we are one with Him and He with us, as the members are one with the body, and as the branches are one with the vine. It was this life of union with Him of which our blessed Lord Himself spake when He said, ‘I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you.’ It was this blessed life of union in the Father, and by the Son, and through the Holy Ghost, which it was the very work and purpose of the Incarnation to secure. It was this life of union with Him for which He pleaded in His marvellous prayer—‘Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which

Thou gavest Me I have given them ; that they may be one, even as We are one : I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in One.'

It is in this life of union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ that the regaining of happiness alone is possible for man.

Now let us go on to see how the Resurrection and Ascension of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ crowns it all.

He, the Incarnate God, the sinless Man, risen from the dead, and ascended into Heaven, now lives for ever as man, in the possession, and in the exercise, of perfectly healthful life, and therefore in perfect happiness. In His hands and feet are the marks of those wounds and sufferings which He endured in atonement for all the evil deeds, and all the wanderings from the paths of virtue, that sin had caused. In His side the mark of the spear testifies to the atonement made for all the evil caused by perverted will and affection. On His brow the scars of the crown of thorns bear their everlasting and blessed testimony to the atonement, through humility, made for all the miserable pride of intellect and spiritual rebellion, that man in his folly and madness has raised against his Creator. But now all sorrow is past, all suffering is over, and perfect happiness is secured to man in Him.

And as we hear Him say, 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches ;' 'Abide in Me, and I in you ;' 'Because I live, ye shall live also,' we know this, that those who are united with Him, and whose union with Him remains unbroken, are already partakers of His life.

But then there comes in this thought: we shall all

die. Yes, certainly, we shall all die. The time will come—unless first our blessed Lord Jesus Christ should come in glory, when we shall all be changed—the time will come when body and soul shall be separated for a while ; in that sense it is true we shall all die. Yet still if we be united with Him, because He lives we shall live also. ‘I am the Resurrection and the Life : he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die.’

As man’s life is threefold, so is there the threefold death of man. There is the physical death, the moral and social death, and the spiritual death.

Physical death, the separation of the soul and the body for a time—that we must all undergo ; it will come to us as the remaining penalty of sin ; but we need never die either the moral or the spiritual death, for by the merits of Jesus Christ eternal life is restored to us, and it is within our reach if only we be penitent and faithful.

So long as man’s higher life is united with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, the Undying One, he does not, he cannot, die. That life, in union with Him, must go on living, growing, and developing.

Jesus Christ has risen in His perfect human nature, body, soul and spirit. He lives for ever ; there can be no more separation. ‘Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more ; death hath no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once ; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God.’ If I am united with Jesus Christ, and if that union is maintained ; if I am never by my own wilful act separated from Him, I must rise to eternal life. Then I shall in Him possess perfectly

healthful life of body, soul and spirit, in an unending union with God through Him.

Ah, the happiness of it ! Perfect health of the body in all its new and glorious conditions of immortality. No more pain, no more sickness, no more suffering, no more weariness, no more death.

Ah, the happiness of it ! Perfect health in the moral and social life. No more sorrow or anguish of heart, no more misunderstandings or bitterness of soul, no more quarrels or contests with evil, no more wounded affections or disappointed hopes. Intellectual difficulties all removed, doubts all set at rest, all fears banished. No more darkness, but all things plainly seen and clearly understood. 'Knowing, even as also we are known.'

Ah, the happiness of it ! Perfect health in the spiritual life ; a will for ever one with the will of God ; no more temptation ever to depart from it ; no more sin possible ; no cloud to darken the vision, no mist to obscure the brightness ; 'seeing Him as He is ;' and 'knowing even as also we are known,' the perfect love of God having cast out all fear ; the soul permitted to gaze with clear and unclouded vision on the matchless perfections of the All-perfect One.

Perfect happiness, in the possession, and in the exercise, of perfectly healthful life ; and that not for a time only, but for ever, with nothing to mar it, or to interfere with it, or to cut it short. Perfect happiness for ever found, and secured, in God Himself, and herein the glory of God manifested.

Ah ! it is worth waiting for, it is worth struggling for, it is worth fighting for. Is it not ?

What shall we not give in time to win this in eternity !

Let us remember that all this is not a mere possibility, but, by the grace of God, it is for us, if only we will, a certainty.

‘Happy is the man that findeth wisdom.’

‘If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.’

‘Oh ! well is thee, and happy shalt thou be !’

II.

Helps and Hindrances in the Spiritual Life.

- I. THE PLACES OF DRAWING WATER.
- II. THE WELLS OF SALVATION.
- III. THE DEVIL, THE FOE OF THE SOUL.
- IV. THE WORLD, THE FOE OF THE SOUL.
- V. THE FLESH, THE FOE OF THE SOUL.

I.

THE PLACES OF DRAWING WATER.

‘They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water.’—JUDGES v. 11.

WE have said that by the spiritual life is to be understood the ordinary daily life lived in union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. It is the life that we have to live now in the flesh, though not after the flesh, in the world, though not of the world ; and we have already pointed out that this life which we have to live now here in the flesh is, and so long as we are here on earth will be, one long, never-ceasing, battle with evil ; and that it is a battle which we must fight ; there is no escape from it ; for evil does not wait for us to be the aggressors—it attacks us whether we will or no ; and it is a battle in which we must conquer, or in which we must be conquered. There is no middle course ; it must be either the one or the other. It must be either victory or defeat.

Our blessed Lord Jesus Christ has lived on earth this life in the flesh ; He has fought this battle against evil, and He has conquered ; and in Him we also may conquer, and from Him we may receive the crown of eternal life, as the reward of faithful conflict.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Captain of our salvation, sends us forth fully equipped for the warfare ; He has provided us with all the weapons, both offensive and

defensive, that can be required ; He has supplied us with all the grace, help, and strength which we need, in order that we may fight the battle successfully. He has created, and pointed out to us, the sources whence all the grace, help, and strength needed may be drawn ; and it is around these very sources whence we are daily to draw grace, help, and strength for the battle, that the contest will have to be maintained most keenly ; it is here that the battle ever rages most fiercely, and that the enemies of our souls gather thickest and fastest.

It is this thought which we will try to illustrate in the following considerations, viz. that the warfare of the spiritual life has to be carried on with especial care, prudence, watchfulness, courage, and zeal, around all those things which are included in the term 'the means of grace,' those things which are typified by 'the places of drawing water.'

Now the life of the Church of Christ, and therefore indirectly the life of each member of the Church, the life of the Christian, is constantly to be seen illustrated by types and figures contained in the Old Testament history. For instance, the story of the conquest of the land of promise by the children of Israel, and of their struggles, their successes, and their failures, is one which typifies in a very remarkable manner the battle of the spiritual life in which we are all engaged ; and in this sense we propose now to consider it. But before doing so we will dwell for a few moments on this Song of Deborah, which not only contains the story of a great victory, but also throws much light upon the difficulties which the children of Israel had to encounter in their struggle for conquest and independence.

First, we notice that this Song of Deborah was the utterance of the nation's triumphant joy, and of its gratitude to God for a marvellous deliverance from a great and overwhelming oppression.

Objection has often been made that in this song, the cruel, unwomanly, treacherous, and cold-blooded deed of Jael in slaying Sisera, who had sought the shelter and hospitality of her tent, has been extolled. Well, we are not now concerned in defending Jael's act, and it is perhaps sufficient for us to point out that it should be remembered that Deborah, prophetess though she certainly was, would seem to have been here expressing the nation's thankfulness for deliverance; that the nation would naturally warmly express its gratitude, without entering, with any minute criticism, into the question of the morality of the act whereby that deliverance had been effected; and that it was only reasonable, and right, that Jael's name should be handed down to posterity as that of one who shared the glory of having helped in bringing about a great national blessing. For beyond all question this deliverance had been a very great blessing to the nation. Let us for a few moments consider the history.

About a hundred and fifty years before this time, the children of Israel, under the leadership of Joshua, had passed through Jordan, and had entered into possession of the promised land; but, though in actual possession of their promised inheritance, the land had not yet been completely conquered. Some of the nations, who were eventually to be driven out, had been still left amongst them in the land, and round about them; and the final, complete, and peaceful, possession of their inheritance was to come to the children of Israel, later on, as the reward of faithful obedience to God.

During the life of Joshua, and for some little time afterwards, all things went on well ; but after that, the children of Israel began to fall away and to rebel against God ; whenever they did thus rebel, the nations who had been left amongst them were used as instruments of punishment. They were allowed to grow strong, to oppress the Israelites, and to bring them into subjection ; yet whenever the children of Israel turned to God in repentance He forgave their misdeeds, and in His mercy He vouchsafed them deliverance. For this purpose He raised up for them, from time to time, judges who broke the yoke of the oppressors, and the land had rest. Already Othniel had thus delivered them in the north, Ehud in central Palestine, and Shamgar in the south.

The deliverance by the latter was, at the time of which we are speaking, still in the memory of many of the people. The oppression from which he had freed them was referred to by Deborah. The people had been prevented from possessing any weapons of defence ; they were hemmed in on all sides by their enemies. Their flocks and their herds were carried away, and their crops destroyed. The highways were unoccupied, and travellers passed through byways. Fear had settled down upon the people ; the courage and the life of the nation were well-nigh crushed out. On their repentance, however, Shamgar was raised up to help them. Using the instrument of his daily toil, he made an onslaught on the Philistines with such success that, for a time, they were driven back, and again the land had rest. But it was only for a time : very soon the people had again fallen away like their forefathers, and again they were punished by oppression, this time from

the north, and for twenty years Jabin, King of Canaan, 'mightily oppressed the children of Israel.' At last, however, the people again repented and turned to God, and He sent them again a message of mercy.

Deborah's enthusiasm rekindled the nation's courage. The forces of Israel were gathered together, and led forth to meet the invading hosts. Then there followed the battle, the terrible storm of hail and rain doing more than aught else to defeat the invaders. The stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The river Kishon, swollen into a mighty torrent, swept them away. Sisera's army, disorganised, broken, and driven back, was utterly destroyed; and Sisera himself, in his flight seeking refuge in Heber's tent, was slain by Jael.

The victory was complete; the deliverance was absolute; once more there was security, peace, and rest for the land; and then there rang out the glad song of praise and thanksgiving; and amongst those called upon to rehearse the story of God's mercies were 'they that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water.' It is true that the words of our English version may not here give the most accurate rendering of the passage; but, at any rate, they convey an idea of one of the results of the victory; which would be the setting free, for the use of the people, the wells or places of drawing water, which were to them of so great importance; and taking the passage as it stands, we have but to consider the matter for a moment to see how great a blessing is implied in these words, 'delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water.'

We notice first how remarkably the value and importance of the wells to the people in Eastern lands is

constantly forced upon our notice in Holy Scripture. The very life of the people depended on their possessing the wells, whence the daily supply of water for themselves, for their flocks, and for their herds, was to be drawn. To dig a well was to be a lasting benefactor to the nation. Of Uzziah in his faithful days, before he fell away from God, it is said that he 'dugged many wells.' As a record of his life, perpetuating his memory, it is said of a great king, Hezekiah, that 'he made a pool and a conduit, and brought water into the city.' The wells were looked upon as the most precious possessions that could be handed on from generation to generation. Names were given to the wells as centres of life and prosperity. To take and to hold the wells was practically to subdue and to hold the country. And it is so still in the East. We have had this illustrated during late years; throughout the story of the Egyptian campaign, the question of holding, or failing to hold, the wells, was once and again the key to success, or the forerunner of failure.

Their value and importance being so great, it is only natural that there should gather around these wells a marvellous amount of interest.

We read of much-needed refreshment given, and of fainting courage revived, at these wells, these places of drawing water. There is the touching story of Hagar, as she fled from the anger and oppression of Sarah, being found by the angel 'by a fountain of water in the wilderness'; and in the refreshment there given, she returned, at God's command, to her allegiance and to her duty. Later on we read of her again in the wilderness, wandering forth with her son, her store of provisions exhausted, her child at the point of death. She, being unable to bear the sight of his dying anguish, laid him

under one of the shrubs, and went away and sat down over against him and wept, and, heart-broken, she said, 'Let me not see the death of the child.' But God heard the voice of the lad ; the angel spake to her a message of encouragement. God opened her eyes and showed her a 'well of water,' from whence she drew refreshment, health, and restoration for the lad.

Later on we read of the children of Israel, after they had been delivered from the bondage of Egypt, after they had been led safely through the Red Sea, journeying down the dry burning desert that lay along by its shore. They were fainting with the three days' weary journey, during which they found no water to drink. At last the waters of Marah were reached ; but the water was found to be bitter—they could not drink of it—and their terrible disappointment broke out into the bitter murmur, 'What shall we drink ?' The waters were sweetened by the wood cast into them by God's command, and thus refreshment was given, and in that refreshment they journeyed on to Elim, 'where were twelve wells of water, and three score and ten palm trees, and they encamped there by the waters.' What a volume of thankfulness for refreshment do those words speak, 'they encamped there by the waters' !

Not only was there refreshment given and courage revived at the wells, but there also we find the most binding and sacred of covenants made, and ratified. We read of the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech made at the well of Beersheba, 'the well of the oath.' We find that covenant renewed, in later years, between Isaac and Abimelech at the wells.

Fierce contests, too, were engaged in and maintained around these wells. Isaac's servants digged a well, and

it was called Esek, or 'contention,' from the fierce contest that took place between those who had digged it and the herdmen of Gerar. They digged another, and strove for that also, and it was called Sitna, or 'hatred,' from the bitterness of the strife.

Besides the records of refreshment given, of covenants entered into, and of contests maintained, we read very lovely stories of generous and gentle help given at the wells. There is the story of Jacob meeting Rachel at the wells and helping her, as he rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, that she might water her flock. There is the story, too, of Moses, who, in his flight from Egypt, came into the land of Midian, and in his wanderings sat down by a well, whither after a while came the seven daughters of Jethro 'and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock.' While they were thus engaged the shepherds came and drove them away, 'but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered the flock.'

So, too, we read of earnest and faithful prayers being offered up to God at the wells.

Few stories are more touching or more beautiful than that of Eliezer of Damascus, Abraham's steward; revealing as it does the touching tenderness and confidence of the master, and the splendid loyalty and faithfulness of the servant. For long years Abraham had no son, and this Eliezer of Damascus was his heir. Years went on, and when all expectation of the birth of a son who should come between Abraham and his steward had ceased, Isaac was born. When Isaac was born all prospect of Eliezer succeeding to Abraham's wealth and position, both of which had now become very great, was of course destroyed, and any hopes on the subject

which he might have entertained were dashed to the ground. But the splendid loyalty, deep affection, and upright faithfulness of the servant never wavered, no, not for a moment ; for forty long years he went on, true and loyal-hearted, serving his master as faithfully, and as lovingly, now that he was merely a servant in his master's house, as he had done when he was the recognised heir to his master's wealth.

And at the end of those forty years that long, and faithful, service was rewarded by the most touching confidence which could possibly have been reposed in him. Abraham in his old age determined to select a wife for Isaac, that God's promise to him might be fulfilled that 'in him and in his seed all nations of the earth should be blessed.' Abraham was deeply impressed by the importance of making this selection. He and his descendants were to be separated from all other nations of the earth. They were to be the channels through which was to be given the great universal Blessing. They were to be kept free from the pollutions, and the sins, of the nations round about them. Isaac was not to have a wife from among the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom Abraham was living. She was to be a wife fetched from afar. Whom should he choose for so important, so delicate, and so difficult a matter as this of choosing a wife for his son ? To whom should he intrust this important mission ?

He sent for Eliezer, 'the eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had.' He made him swear that he would faithfully discharge his mission, and then he sent him to Padan-aram to choose from among Abraham's kindred a wife for Isaac. It is impossible to conceive of any more beautiful, or touching, evidence than this,

either of generous confidence on the one part or of loyal faithfulness on the other—a perfect example of the relations which ever ought to exist between employer and employed.

The servant was then sent forth as an ambassador, with the master's blessing resting on him, and with the promise that God's angel should go before him. And, his long journey completed, Eliezer came at last to the city of Nahor, and there, outside the city, he rested his camels, 'by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water.' And there for a while he waited; the time for making his choice was drawing near. Fully conscious of the dignity and of the importance of his mission, he did what ever should at such times be done—he prayed for help. His name, Eliezer, means 'My God is my help.' He seems to have been a man of prayer, whether his name came to him from his character, or whether his character was influenced by his name. His prayer was very earnest, humble, and faithful.

'O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that Thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.'

Hardly had he ended his prayer when Rebekah came, and then Rebekah answered as he had prayed that she whom God had chosen might answer. And the prayer

thus manifestly answered filled the good old man's heart with gratitude, and he 'bowed down his head and worshipped the Lord,' and he said : 'Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth ; I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren.'

And so Rebekah was chosen after prayer—chosen there at one of these wells of water. So also it was by a well that Jacob afterwards first met Rachel his wife ; so, too, in later years, did Moses first meet Zipporah his wife at a well.

Very earnest and faithful prayers have been offered by the wells, the places of drawing water. How wonderful is the interest that goes on gathering around these wells !

But even this is not all that we find, for we notice, further, that splendid deeds of heroism were done at the wells.

It were difficult to find an instance of more heroic devotion than that of David's three mighty men, Adino, Eleazar, and Shammah, who risked their lives for him in the days of his adversity, when, though persecuted by Saul, he was faithfully fighting Saul's enemies. The garrison of the Philistines was in Bethlehem, and David, wearied with battle and almost fainting, longed, and said : 'Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate.' And these three faithful followers of his heard him, and with heroic devotion hardly to be surpassed 'they brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David ; nevertheless, he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord, and he said : Be

it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this ; is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives ?'

Very splendid was the heroism thus displayed at the well of Bethlehem.

And, lastly, we cannot fail to notice the glorious teaching vouchsafed at the wells. 'Jesus came to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well ; and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water ; Jesus saith unto her, Give Me to drink.' And then He went on to unfold to her great and glorious truths concerning Himself, who had come to open for men the 'wells of salvation,' and to give to faint and dying sinners that 'living water' of which 'whosoever drinketh shall never thirst' ; that living water which shall be in the soul of him to whom it is given 'a well of water springing up into everlasting life.'

Ah, how great, how intense, is the interest that gathers around all these places of drawing water !—these wells, where refreshment was given and fainting courage was revived ; where solemn covenants were entered into and renewed ; where contests were maintained ; where gentle help was afforded and earnest prayers were offered ; where heroic deeds were done, and, above all, where the highest teaching was vouchsafed.

And it was around these wells that the enemies in the days of old gathered, and waited, and watched to harass and to destroy ; around these wells so essential to the very life of the people ; these precious possessions, these points of importance in the holding of the country—it was around these that the battle ever waxed

the fiercest and that the enemies gathered thickest. If only the enemy could hinder the Israelites from drawing their necessary supplies from these sources they could keep them out of the Land of Promise, and prevent them from enjoying its peaceful possession.

There could, then, be no blessing greater than this, to be 'delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water.'

'Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way. They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of His villages in Israel.'

II.

THE WELLS OF SALVATION.

‘With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.’—ISAIAH
xii. 3.

THE story of the Christian’s life here on earth, in the struggle that has to be continually carried on, by God’s help, against all the powers of evil, is constantly to be seen typified in the various scenes recorded in the history of God’s people of old as it relates their progress, under His protection, from bondage and slavery to freedom and conquest. Especially, perhaps, is this the case in that part of the history which records the struggle which the nation had to maintain after it had been delivered from the degradation, and from the misery, of the Egyptian bondage, and had been led through the Red Sea, through the wilderness, and across the Jordan, and had entered into the partial possession of its inheritance.

Even when Jordan was safely passed and the Land of Promise was occupied ; when the walls of Jericho had fallen and many cities had been taken, all was not yet done. There yet remained a great and unceasing struggle to be maintained through long centuries before their enemies would be finally destroyed, and the land secured to them in peace. By little and little were the sinful nations, the inhabitants of the land, to be driven out. The nation of Israel was to grow strong, not by

having everything done for it, but by having to fight its way, step by step, with varying success and failure, ever upwards and onwards, towards conquest, possession, and independence ; and in this never-ceasing struggle God's chosen people were to undergo the discipline both of defeat and of victory, of punishment and of assistance ; that by it they should learn that obedience was the only means to success ; and also that they should be constantly reminded that God who had led them out of Egypt ; who had fed them in the wilderness ; and who had brought them into the Land of Promise, was with them still, feeding and protecting them, and winning for them, and through them, the victories which without Him they could not gain.

Now we have seen that in this gradual and progressive conquest of the land the question of possessing and holding the wells, the places of drawing water, was of especial importance. To hold the wells was to hold the keys of the position ; it was in fact to subdue and to hold the country. The very life of the people depended upon the possession of these wells. Daily access to them was absolutely necessary that the daily needs of themselves, their families, their flocks, and their herds, might be supplied.

To dig a well was looked upon as a national benefit. The wells were held to be the most precious possessions that could be handed on to those who should come after.

We have also seen something of the intense interest, and tender association, which naturally, as time went on, had gathered around these centres of life and sources of prosperity.

At these wells refreshment was given and courage revived, solemn engagements were entered into and

fierce contests were maintained, generous help was given and earnest prayers were offered, heroism was displayed and the highest teaching was vouchsafed.

And it was at the wells that the enemies gathered thickly, and watched and waited to harass, and to destroy, those who should seek to draw water for their daily needs, and so to hinder them from obtaining final possession of the land. If only they could be hindered from having access to the wells they would practically be kept out of the land.

Now what is all this but a type and figure of what continually goes on in our own spiritual life, as, day by day, we maintain the struggle and the effort to hold, and finally to possess, the Land of Promise, upon the first stage of the possession of which we have already entered by our passage through the waters of Holy Baptism—the kingdom of Heaven of which we have already been made the inheritors?

We have been delivered from the bondage of sin; passing through the waters of Holy Baptism, we have been placed in the Land of Promise, the Church of Christ here on earth; but we are not yet in peaceful possession of our inheritance; that is to come to us hereafter, as the reward of faithful conflict. We have yet before us a long warfare, a lifelong struggle; much has been done for us; but there are left enemies all round about us, who are ever trying to hinder our progress towards conquest and possession. So long as we are faithful and obedient to God's commandments they are kept in check and subdued; the moment we rebel against God they grow strong and bring us into subjection; but then, turning to God in repentance, He has mercy on us and sends us help and deliverance.

There are in the kingdom of God 'the wells of salvation' whence we are to draw those daily supplies of grace whereby we may be able to live our daily life in union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, and so obtain strength to fight our spiritual foes; just as there were for the children of Israel in the land of their inheritance 'wells of water' whence they were to draw the daily supplies they needed, that they might grow strong and subdue their national enemies.

But now we have to consider what we mean by these 'wells of salvation.'

First of all, then, we understand by the expression 'the wells of salvation' the Sacraments and Rites of the Church of God: all those means of grace, appointed by God, by and through which union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ is first effected, then strengthened and maintained—Holy Baptism, in which that union is supernaturally effected; Confirmation, in which that union is confirmed and strengthened; Holy Communion, in which that union is maintained, and in which 'our sinful bodies are made clean by His Body, and our souls washed through His most precious Blood, that we may evermore dwell in Him, and He in us;' Holy Matrimony, wherein is given, to those who seek it, grace to live holy and pure lives, each helping the other on the way to heaven, and grace also to 'bring up their children in the fear and nurture of the Lord and the praise of His holy Name.' Holy Orders, wherein the Holy Ghost is given for the work of the priesthood in the Church of God, and whereby the administration of the Sacraments, and the permanence of the channels of grace are secured for the pardon and salvation of souls.

Our thoughts naturally and at once rest upon these

as manifestly 'the wells of salvation'; and around them there are certainly gathered, in the highest degree, all that intense interest, and all those tender and glorious associations, of which we have spoken in connection with 'the wells of water.' Refreshment is given at these 'wells of salvation'—ah, yes, refreshment beyond what it is in the power of words to describe. 'A new birth unto righteousness.' The sevenfold gifts of the Holy Ghost, 'the spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength, knowledge and true godliness, and the spirit of holy fear.' 'The Body and Blood of Christ for the strengthening and refreshing of our souls.' 'The mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other' in the holy estate of matrimony. The blessed assurance of the power from on high to sustain the priest under the pressure of the awful responsibilities of his office. The comfort of absolution and the peace of pardoned sin.

At these 'wells of salvation' the most solemn and binding covenants have been entered into, and again and again renewed. There were the promises made on our part at the Font 'to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, to believe all the articles of the Christian faith, and to keep God's holy will and commandments, and to walk in the same all the days of our life.' And on God's part the promise of grace and of the reward of eternal life. These promises were renewed at our Confirmation, and further gifts of grace were given and there promised to us. At Holy Communion that covenant between God and us has been again and again renewed, confirmed, and sealed. In Holy Matrimony the holiest and most solemn, as well as the most loving and the happiest, of human covenants have been made and

confirmed. And of all the solemn covenants that can be made those made in Holy Orders are the most solemnly binding.

And around these 'wells of salvation' the keenest of contests have been maintained, and the most glorious victories have been won all along the history of the Church.

Here, too, at these wells of salvation have prayers been offered—ah, yes, the most humble, the most earnest, the most faithful, and the most effectual of all our prayers. And those prayers were not only offered, but they were answered, too—answered in the most wonderful way, often as directly as was that of Eliezer. Have we no recollection of this? Surely we have. Earnest intercession at Holy Communion, fervent prayers at Confirmation, loving prayers and intercession as the marriage vows were made, heartfelt gratitude and earnest prayer for the little ones at the Font. Ah, yes, we have all offered fervent and effectual prayers beside these 'wells of salvation.' And we have all received help at these places of drawing water. The help of God's grace has been freely and bountifully bestowed. And what wonderful teaching has been vouchsafed to us there? All that quiet, silent, secret teaching of the heart and conscience, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that silent teaching whereby our eyes have been opened that we might see 'the wondrous things of God's law.'

And besides the Sacraments and the Rites of the Church, there are other 'wells of salvation' from which we are daily to draw supplies of grace for our daily needs. There are all those other things which we also ordinarily include under the term 'the means of grace.' Prayer, the study of God's holy Word, meditation, self-exami-

nation, public worship, the preaching of the Word—all these and many like things are ‘wells of salvation’; and around them, too, the interest of which we have been speaking gathers. All these we at once, with one consent, admit to be means of grace.

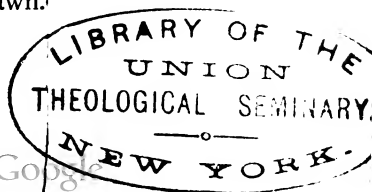
But there are many other things which are not so generally thought of, and used, as ‘wells of salvation,’ though they ought to be so regarded, and so used, by the Christian who is striving to live the spiritual life. For instance, there are all the gifts and the powers of our nature with which God has endowed us; the instincts, appetites, and passions; the five senses and the gift of articulate speech, the memory, the understanding, and the will; the affections and the conscience—all these should be means of grace to us.

Then, again, there are all the circumstances that surround our lives; the home and the family with all its cares and with all its joys. What refreshment and comfort there is, or there ought to be, there! To the weary and jaded, to the anxious and careworn, to the sick, sorrowful, and suffering, there is no place like the home. What contests to defend it and to preserve it from evil or sorrow are often maintained! What loving and solemn covenants, binding heart to heart, and soul to soul, in the strong bonds of esteem and love, are made there, are they not? And the prayers, too, that are offered in and for the home; all those earnest prayers for the dear ones who form it, that are offered up wherever we may be! There is help given, too, gentle, loving help given by one to another in the home, is there not? And surely the home is the scene of heroic deeds. Think, for a moment only, of the splendid heroism that has marked the self-denying efforts of many a father and

mother for their children. Ah, yes, and of many a child for the parents, too. Many and many a poor garret in the crowded city has been the scene of as real heroism as ever was displayed on the battle-fields of the world. Then we remember, also, that there is the teaching of the home—teaching, it ought to be, of the very best. Many and many a soul owes everything to the teaching of the home. Look back, for a moment, to the time when, as a little child, you first learnt to lisp your prayers at your mother's knee; all the love of that young mother beaming upon you as she taught you to say, 'Our Father which art in heaven,' her own heart overflowing with gratitude to God for the gift that He had given her in you. The hearts of most of us soften, no matter how hard they may have since grown, as we think of the holy and lovely teaching of those early days. Ah, yes, the home is a 'well of salvation,' whence daily supplies of grace are to be drawn by those who need it and seek it.

Once more, there is all the work and business of life. It has its toil and labour, and its anxieties no doubt. But, however anxious it may at times be, it surely has its refreshment also: around it frequent contests have to be maintained for justice and honesty. In it, too, there is certainly a field for prayer. It affords splendid opportunities of giving generous help to others; business life is largely based on binding covenants; there is in it always much to be learnt; and it is by no means excluded from the exercise of noble heroism.

Recreation, again, of all kinds, whether of body or of mind: the exercise we take, the literature we read, the art we delight in, the amusements we join in—they are all 'wells' whence grace may be drawn.



Joy and sorrow, prosperity and adversity, sickness and health—we claim them all as ‘wells of salvation.’

But, it may be said, these things of which we have now been speaking, in some way or other, fall to the lot of all men, at least in some degree. We all have our natural gifts, our bodily and mental powers, reason and intellect, intelligence and understanding, affections, will, and conscience; in varying degree and measure these things are possessed by all. We all have our homes and families, and our work to do; we all have our recreations and our amusements; joy and sorrow, prosperity and adversity, sickness and health, are, more or less, the common lot of all.

Quite so; but to the Christian man who is living the spiritual life all these things will be ‘means of grace,’ ‘places of drawing water,’ ‘wells of salvation.’

We have already spoken on this point, but it will well bear repetition. The spiritual life is the ordinary daily life lived in union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. No greater or more fatal mistake can be made than that of separating the spiritual life from the ordinary daily life.

We cannot live two lives, serving God in the one and the world in the other: ‘ye cannot serve God and Mammon.’ Men have tried to do it over and over again, and what has the result always been? Self-deception exposed at last. God cannot be deceived. Neither in this matter can a man continue for long to deceive either himself or others. God has not been served in such a life, and the world, in the end, claims its own. Ah, the misery and the horror of this double life that men do sometimes try to live, the exposure of which, from time to time, shocks even worldly men:

the double life which they try to live who are hearers of the Word only, but not doers of it, deceiving themselves—hearers of good and doers of evil.

But short of this double life, so despicable in itself that it is scouted even by the world, we know that the daily life may be lived apart from God, and that, alas! is only too common.

The daily life lived apart from God, that is the life of the natural man.

The daily life lived in union with Jesus Christ, that is the spiritual life.

We must be living the one life, or the other. But we cannot live both lives at one and the same time. We cannot be in a state of grace with regard to some things, and at the same time not in a state of grace with regard to other things. We must be living a life of grace, or a life which is not the life of grace. Either the spiritual life or the natural life.

Two men may be living surrounded by circumstances as nearly as possible the same; they may have the same average amount of health and strength; they may be engaged in the same kind of work or business; they may be in receipt of the same wages or salary; they may be turning out the same kind of work, the work of the one being just as good as that of the other; in all outward respects the circumstances of their lives may be alike; they may be moving in the same circle of society: and yet the inner lives of those two men may be entirely different the one from the other.

The one may be living the merely natural life, good in so far as it is free from any gross sin, and from all flagrant breaches of the laws of morality and society, but yet a life that is being lived apart from God—a life unin-

fluenced, in any sensible way, by the thought of God as the Supreme Ruler of the universe ; a life in which God's claim over all the man's thoughts, words, and deeds is not in any way acknowledged ; a life without any higher aim than that of present enjoyment, either in material prosperity, or in the higher matters of cultivated refinement or intellectual pursuit ; a life in which work will be measured by no higher standard than of present gain or pleasure ; a life, the hopes and fears of which will be limited to things of time and sense.

The other may all the while be living the higher, the nobler, and the happier life—the same life so far as earthly things go, but that life lived in union with Jesus Christ, the spiritual life, the life of grace. To him the whole aspect of things will be different—work, leisure, recreation, the home and the family, friendships, the joys and sorrows of life, all these things will to him be means of grace, helps on the road to Heaven, ‘wells of salvation.’ God’s hand will be seen in all things ; earthly prosperity or adversity will have for him far more joy and much less sorrow than for the other. Work will be a means of serving God ; the home will be the training place for the true home in Heaven. The children will be loved all the more tenderly because they, too, are the children of God, and the brightness of the home of the one will be far greater than that of the home of the other, no matter how free even that may be from earthly care or anxiety. The joys of life will be greater, and troubles, should they come, and when they come, will be far lighter ; for it will be known and felt that they are, if rightly used, but helps to lead him, on and on, ever nearer to God ; and that ‘the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.’

If a man be living in union with Jesus Christ, his life may be like the valley of tears, full of sorrows and troubles ; yet 'going through the vale of misery he will use it for a well, and the pools shall be filled with water.' His life may appear to be dreary and barren like the wilderness, yet for him 'the wilderness shall be made a standing water and water-springs of a dry ground.' His life may be surrounded by circumstances hard and stony, and yet for him God 'will bring water out of the stony rocks.'

All these things, then, the Sacraments and means of grace, all the powers of our complex nature, all the circumstances surrounding our lives, our homes, and our families, our work and our business, our recreations and amusements, our joys and our sorrows, are to be to us 'wells of salvation,' 'places of drawing water,' whence we may obtain the daily supplies of grace which are needed in order that we may be enabled to live the spiritual life. And at the same time that they are channels through which we may obtain grace, they are also fields for its exercise wherein we may use the grace given, and 'so do the will of Him that sent us and finish His work.' And thus as we walk in the midst of the furnace of trial, toil, and affliction in this life, if only we take this true view of all these things and use them aright, we may well say, with Ananias, Azarias, and Misael of old, who, as they walked in the midst of the burning fiery furnace together with 'one like unto the Son of God,' sang : 'O ye wells ! bless ye the Lord ; praise Him and magnify Him for ever.'

III.

THE DEVIL, THE FOE OF THE SOUL.

‘The fiery darts of the wicked.’—EPIHESIANS vi. 16.

AROUND these ‘wells of salvation’ of which we have been speaking, all these sources of help and channels of grace that God, in His great love and mercy, has given to us in the spiritual life, the enemies of our souls gather and attack us. All these blessed gifts, the Sacraments, the Rites of the Church, and all the means of grace, our natural powers, our intellectual gifts, our homes, families, business, recreation, joys and sorrows, form the battle-field where the contest has to be fought and where the victory must be won. Here the enemies gather thickly and wait and watch to attack us, to drive us back, and to hinder us from obtaining those daily supplies of grace which are necessary for us if we are to hold our own and finally to obtain peaceful possession of our inheritance in Heaven.

There are hindrances to our spiritual life as well as helps to it. It is of these hindrances that we have now to speak.

In order to meet them and to overcome them we must first see what they are, and so we come to the

question, Who and what are these enemies of the soul—these archers at the places of drawing water, whose noise is ever ringing in our ears, as they gather, wait, and watch there to harass and destroy the soul, and to hinder it from obtaining grace from these wells of salvation?

Now, all these enemies of the soul will be found to range themselves, if we may so say, under one or other of the following three great leaders, the devil, the world, and the flesh.

The devil, the external and personal foe of the soul, shooting his fiery darts at it.

The world, both the external and also the internal but impersonal foe of the soul, continually drawing its bow against it.

The flesh, the internal foe of the soul, ever warring against it with its sinful lusts.

The devil, the world, and the flesh are the three leaders of that army of the archers, whose noise is heard, and whose arrows fall so thickly around the 'wells of salvation.'

But here we venture upon a word of caution and of warning.

We are constantly in the habit of hearing the statement that the devil, the world, and the flesh are the three great enemies of our souls; from our childhood we have learnt that these three enemies beset us, and that at our baptism we promised to renounce them and to fight manfully against them. So constantly, ever since our childhood, have we heard this truth repeated that there would seem to be a very great, and a very real, danger, lest our very familiarity with the statement that 'the devil, the world, and the flesh are the enemies of the soul' should cause us to overlook what it is that is

meant by it. There is a very great danger of the expression becoming to us a mere phrase ; containing, indeed, a truth to which we accord, as a sort of matter of course, our assent, but which does not come home to us with any very great clearness of meaning, or with any special reference to ourselves personally.

We believe this to be no imaginary or uncommon danger.

Guarding against this danger, let us now try to bring home to ourselves what it is that we really mean when we speak of the devil, the world, and the flesh as the enemies of the soul.

At the head of these enemies stands the devil, the wicked one, whose fiery darts assail us at 'the wells of salvation' ; a created being ; a personal being ; that is to say, one who has a free will, and who is therefore capable of deliberate purpose and independent action ; one who has the power of thinking, reasoning, and determining, and also of carrying out with energy of purpose the resolutions, and the determinations, of his will. One who has not ever been what he now is. He was originally created one of the highest and brightest of the heavenly host ; possessed of knowledge and light, understanding and will, and capable of happiness in the highest possible degree.

But, possessing all these powers and gifts, he set himself deliberately to oppose the known and necessary laws of God. Not tempted from without, but of his own will, he rebelled against God. He set himself, in his pride, to oppose every law of God, to defy in every respect his Creator ; to mar and hinder, in every way that was possible for him to mar and hinder, the work of the Creator.

His first effort was to disturb the harmony and the peace of heaven ; he drew into the ranks of his rebellion some of the lower orders of the heavenly hosts. They, sharing in his rebellion, shared in his punishment. He and his followers were cast out of heaven, banished for ever from the realms of light, glory, and happiness. Created an Angel of Light, he became, by his own will, the Prince of Darkness. He then directed his energies to the perversion of man's will. Succeeding in this, he brought about rebellion where there had hitherto been loyal obedience ; disease where there had hitherto been healthful life ; discontent and selfishness where unselfishness and contentment had hitherto reigned ; and unhappiness where hitherto all had been happiness ; and thus he became the author of all that evil the results and evidences of which are now seen on all sides in human life. His hatred and malice have ever since followed in the track of God's love. Having destroyed the happiness that man was to have enjoyed through creation, he goes on to hinder man from regaining the happiness recovered for him by the Incarnation, and to be obtained by him through sanctification.

'The devil is a created spirit, a personal being, who has deliberately set his whole will in opposition to the will of God ; and, remaining permanently in this rebellion, is ever seeking to draw others into its ranks.'

Since he first rebelled he has ever been the tempter of others. He drew away from God some of the angels, who are now evil spirits fighting against their Creator. He tempted our first parents and drew them away from their allegiance to God. He tempted our blessed Lord Jesus Christ in His human nature, and was resisted, foiled and overcome. He has tempted, and tried to

destroy, every soul that God has ever created and sent into the world. He is ever like a 'roaring lion, walking about seeking whom he may devour.'

Throughout the history of the human race from beginning to end, as it is recorded in God's Word—and all men will at least acknowledge that the Bible is the most wonderful of all the histories of human life, thought, feeling, and action, that have ever been written—throughout that history the devil is set forth, either directly or indirectly, as working with all the energy of his determined will, with all the malice of his permanent hatred, and with all the exercise of his consummate skill, to bring about the destruction of the souls of men, and so to mar, so far as he may, the work of God.

The devil, then, being the enemy of God, is the foe of the soul, and he lies in wait at 'the wells of salvation,' that he may cast his 'fiery darts' at us; that he may drive us back and hinder us from obtaining the necessary supplies of grace.

We now go on to see how he does this. First, he shoots his fiery darts at the Church of God, though we have the blessed assurance that against it 'the gates of hell shall not prevail.' Still he attacks her, he tries to destroy her harmony, disturb her peace, and to hinder her work for God's glory and the salvation of souls. He stirs up strife within her ranks; he has brought about all the heresy and schism, all the grievous divisions, that rend her and wound her, confining and crippling her energies. The foes within as well as the foes without are all of his making.

He shoots his fiery darts at us as we seek grace in the Blessed Sacraments; he fills the hearts of men with pride and self-conceit, and urges them on to ques-

tion and to deny the solemn truths of Revelation ; and to argue about the Blessed Sacraments and all the mysteries of the faith, and thus he surrounds even those holy and blessed things with all the fierce controversy in which his dupes, in their pride and in their folly, engage. It is he who kindles all the bitterness and all the party strife which are thereby engendered. Ah ! there it is, around all these holy things, that the battle rages fiercely—there, where all should be so calm and solemn, so peaceful, so quiet and so helpful—it is there that the war-cry resounds and the ‘noise of the archers’ is heard.

He casts his fiery darts at the soul even at the very foot of the altar itself. He tries to divert the thoughts of the most earnest and devout ; he suggests doubts to the minds of the most faithful and the most believing ; he tries to inspire fear in the hearts of the most loving and trustful. Our own experience, here in this matter, confirms that of the saints, does it not ? All the saints of God who have ever recorded their spiritual struggles have had, in a greater or less degree, this experience of Satan’s onslaught. They all tell us that even at the most sacred and solemn moments of their lives, when on their knees confessing their sins, when standing ministering at the altar, when engaged in the most solemn offices of religion, there have at times come flashing across their minds thoughts so horrible and terrible, there have come to them doubts so dark and fearful, depression and fears so deep and dreadful—thoughts and doubts and fears which not only their conscience and reason resented, but from which their whole nature revolted—that they could only be described as ‘the fiery darts of the wicked one.’

And our own experience, surely, in some degree endorses this. We all know something of this ; we all have at times thus heard the noise of 'the archers at the places of drawing water' ; we all know something of the pain, and the suffering, inflicted, and of the difficulties created, and of the hindrances put in our way by these 'temptations,' these 'fiery darts of the wicked one.'

Not only around the Sacraments does the devil thus attack us, but he does so, too, as we seek for grace in all the other means which God in His loving-kindness has given us.

He attacks us when on our knees we are seeking grace for ourselves and others in prayer and intercession with God. He tries to hinder us by making our thoughts wander, and so striving to dissipate them and divert them from God.

As we read our Bibles, and devote a few moments to meditation, he suggests false and foolish interpretations ; and tries first to obscure our thoughts and then to draw away our wills from the resolutions we would make.

As we examine ourselves he suggests excuses and extenuations, and even justification, with regard to our sins. In our confessions he suggests easy names for grievous sins, and magnifies the sense of shame so as to lead us away from the shame that bringeth 'glory and peace' to 'the shame that bringeth sin.'

In our acts of public worship he attacks us, keeping us from it so far as he can, magnifying difficulties, and suggesting trivial excuses as valid reasons for neglecting or omitting it ; and even in the house of God he assails us, by suggesting vain and wandering thoughts and moving us to idle and heedless gestures.

He shoots his fiery darts at us as we seek to grow in grace by the faithful exercise of the various powers with which God has endowed us. He suggests doubts and difficulties through the arguments we hear, and through the literature which, under his influence, finds its way to us and attracts our attention. He is thus ever trying to undermine and to shake, and if possible to destroy, the faith ; he seeks to stain the memory ; and he strives to pollute the minds of men. He tries to poison the affections, tempting us through all that is highest, best, and noblest in our nature, as he inspires pride, encourages discontent with our lot in life, and kindles within us evil and foolish ambitions. He strives to make earnest inquiry degenerate into mere idle and useless curiosity, and to cause reason to arrive at faulty or false conclusions.

He strikes at us in our home life, and through our families, by sowing discord and prompting disobedience ; by stirring up strife, envy, jealousy, and malice ; and by thus breaking up the harmony, the peace, and the happiness of the home ; or else he strikes at us through the home by causing us to make it, and the dear ones in it, something to be loved above God and apart from God, so that the moment the sorrow falls, and the home is touched, and the dear one is taken away, God's loving discipline is looked upon as interference which is to be resented, and so His will is rejected, and God Himself is rebelled against.

He tries to hinder our doing God's will as we seek for the increase of grace in the faithful discharge of daily duty, whether it be at home or abroad, in the field or in the city, in the office, in the market, in the study, or on the high seas—wherever it may be. That work

which God has given us to do, whatever it may be, is to be to us a means of grace, the opportunity of serving Him. Work is one of the ordained conditions of man's happiness, and the devil tempts us first by trying to make us neglect it and to be idle ; he suggests to us the drudgery of our work, or the unprofitableness of our work, or the monotony of our work, and tries to make us give it up ; or, failing this, he tries to spoil it by perverting, and corrupting, the spirit in which it is done, tempting us as he tempted our blessed Lord in the wilderness, and trying to make us forget God, and to think that, after all, man does live by bread alone ; and to effect this he will do his utmost to infuse a spirit of gambling and of rash speculation into business, stimulating the covetousness that maketh haste to be rich.

He will put this kind of temptation before us, 'See, here is a profitable opening,' and then he will throw dust in our eyes ; he will point out only the profitable side of the transaction, hiding from view the questions of the probability of disaster to ourselves, and the certainty of injustice to others. We sorely want money, for ourselves, or for our families, and are striving to get it honestly. 'Here is a chance for you,' he whispers.

Command that these stones be made bread.' 'Look at the marvellous profits to be made here.' 'It is just what you want.' 'Risk ? oh, never mind the risk ; there may be none ; probably there will be none.' 'Your eyes shall be opened.' 'Ye shall not surely die.'

Or it may be that we are in some great straits and difficulties ; troubles of some kind or other hem us in on all sides ; for business difficulties money is needed, and needed at once ; so far as we can see, without it ruin seems certain. We can see no way of escape ; here is

again his opportunity ; he suggests a way of escape. 'Just a suppression of part of the truth, it cannot be necessary to tell the whole truth,' or 'just a suggestion, turning inquiry into a false direction ; there can be no harm in that, and the difficulty will be got over.' Or 'there is the cheque-book left lying about, or there is the deed or the document ; it is only the alteration of a figure, or the addition of one ;' 'only a scratch of the pen, or the destruction of a document.' 'It is all so marvellously easy, there is little or no chance of being discovered, and your difficulties will have been removed.' 'Command that these stones be made bread.' 'Ye shall not surely die.' 'Hath God said, Thou shalt not steal?' 'Well, perhaps so, but did He really mean it?' Or, maybe, the devil puts the temptation in another form. 'You have control of this money ; a trust, it is true, held for another purpose ; but still there can be no harm in using it now that there is such urgent need. When it is wanted for the original purpose it can be easily replaced ; it would be only borrowing it for a few days, no one would know ; that, at any rate, would not be stealing ; others would do it in your place.' 'Ye shall not surely die.' 'There is no great danger of any punishment following.' 'It would be almost wrong not to meet these difficulties you have, when it is so easily in your power to meet them.'

Ah ! the fraud and the malice of the devil. What thousands upon thousands have fallen before such temptations as these ! He is ever casting his 'fiery darts at us,' seeking to divert our wills from what is right as he kindles within us the fire of selfishness.

He does not leave us at peace at any one of the 'wells of salvation' ; he attacks us continually, and very

insidiously, in all our recreations and amusements, ever endeavouring to suggest thoughts of evil and deeds of wrong, through the sights we see and the sounds we hear. There is hardly a manly game which he does not try to degrade by infusing into it a gambling spirit ; there is hardly a recreation or amusement, however innocent in itself, that he does not labour to turn into a snare, and even when we have foiled him in his efforts and resisted his temptations, he will return and assail us again with suggestions of spiritual pride and self-complacency.

He is very powerful, he is very skilful, he is very wily, and he is very watchful.

He attacks us by assailing the Church, he attacks us as we frequent the Sacraments, when we are at prayer, in meditation, or at worship. He assails us in our homes, our families, our work, our reading, our recreations ; he is constantly shooting his fiery darts at us. But he is not omnipotent, nor omniscient, nor omnipresent. Our blessed Lord Jesus Christ overcame him ; He came 'to destroy the works of the devil,' and that which it was promised that He, the Seed of the woman, should do, He did : He bruised the serpent's head. In union with our blessed Lord we may overcome and conquer him, too.

Let us take heed to the Apostle's warning, 'Be sober, be vigilant ; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour : whom resist steadfast in the faith.' Yes, thank God ! the shield of faith can 'quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.'

Let us take the shield of faith. Let us live the faith, we hold and profess. If we would but put ourselves heart and soul to do that in every detail of life, we should overcome. Let us do that, and meet the devil's tempta-

tions as our Lord did and answer him as He did—meet him with the weapon of firm adherence to God's Commandments, for that is what our Saviour did in the wilderness.

All through those three answers of our blessed Lord to the tempter in the wilderness there is ringing the note of the First Commandment, 'Thou shalt have none other gods but Me.' Let us listen and hear it.

It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' That First Commandment, 'Thou shalt have none other gods but Me,' must rule my life. I must trust God and Him alone. It is written, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.' That First Commandment must rule my life. I must do God's work in God's ordained way, and not tempt Him by trying even to do that in any other way. It is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.' That First Commandment must rule my life. I must worship God only and serve Him truly all my days.

Let us pray for greater watchfulness. Let us use the shield of faith, and we have the blessed assurance of the Apostle—'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.'

IV.

THE WORLD, THE FOE OF THE SOUL.

‘Lo, the ungodly bend their bow, and make ready their arrows within the quiver: that they may privily shoot at them which are true of heart.’—
PSALM xi. 2.

WE have already pointed out the danger that there is of overlooking, through our very familiarity with the expression, what it is that we really mean by the statement that ‘the devil, the world, and the flesh are the enemies of the soul,’ and we have said that the first of these foes is ‘a created spirit, a personal being, who has deliberately set his whole will in opposition to the Will of God; and remaining permanently in this rebellion, is ever seeking to draw others into its ranks.’

But now besides this personal foe that stands, so to speak, at the head of the great army of enemies who attack us at the ‘wells of salvation’ there are others.

The world is one of them. The devil is a foe external to ourselves; the world is both an external and an internal foe, for it may exist, not only outside us, but in our very hearts. The devil is a personal foe; the world, an impersonal enemy—but on that account none the less to be feared, none the less to be guarded against, for it often comes to us very insidiously in the garb of a friend.

Now we will try to arrive at some clear understand-

ing as to what we mean when we speak of the world as the enemy of the soul—as one of those things which at our baptism we promised to renounce, and against which we undertook to fight manfully under the banner of Jesus Christ.

It is, however, somewhat difficult to define with accuracy what the world is. The word itself is used in so great a variety of meanings, that it is necessary somewhat to clear the way before we can arrive at any definition of the world as the enemy of the soul.

It is not, of course, the world of nature with all its beauties and its loveliness. It is nothing that God has made; yet here on earth we do, and we must, live and move in it. Our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, in that wonderful prayer of His before His Passion, prayed for His disciples to His Father—‘I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth. As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.’

We are to be in the world, our work lies in the midst of the world. As long as we live on earth we must be surrounded by the world, but we are not to be of the world. The world will tempt us, hate us, despise us, and persecute us. We are not to love the world, for to love the world is to be at enmity with God. We are to fight against the world, and in union with our blessed Lord we are to overcome the world, even as He overcame it.

Now, we often hear a great deal about what the world does, of what it thinks, and of what it says; and

very often we find people going in great fear of what the world will think or say. Their conduct is influenced by it. They will court its approval or shrink from its censure; it exercises a distinct influence, and often a great tyranny, over them; and all this as though the world were a person, yet we know that this is not so. There is no one person, nor is there any one class of persons, that can be spoken of as the world in the sense of 'the enemy of the soul.'

We know quite well that when we speak of what the world says, thinks, or does, we mean the world of human life, society—the society in which we move, the society whose relations with us are such as to establish a claim of some kind to our consideration. But it by no means follows that what those who form that society say, think, or do should necessarily be wrong, or that the general influence of that society should be such that we are bound to be in antagonism to it. If that society be living for God it is not the world against which we are to fight. And further it would be far too sweeping and far too general an assertion to say that human society in the abstract is the world, the foe of the soul.

Human society is the creation of God. In it there ought to be the constant expression of the true and rightly directed relations of man with his fellows. Man was created to be a social being. It was God who said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone,' and it was God who gave him an help meet for him. The family is the Divinely appointed germ of human society. The family life is the most sacred and holy; national life will in the main be what the family life is. If the family be what God would have it be, the national life will be what it ought to be; but when once the high-toned

family life begins to die out national decadence is sure to follow.

It was God that created the family life, and it is His order of things that is followed as families grow into communities, tribes, and nations ; and, further, it is His purpose that all nations, kindred, and tongues should be gathered into the one great family of Jesus Christ. This is the Divinely appointed order of the development of human society, and the Christian living the spiritual life is certainly not called upon to set himself in antagonism to the world as thus understood.

But ever since the fall there has been on the part of man the evil tendency to live for self, apart from God, and to adopt lines of thought, and action, which either ignore or contradict the laws of God. Such lines of thought and action thus become suggested by one to another, and are readily adopted. This is to be noticed from the very first. 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat,' was Adam's answer to God ; and ever since then men have been only too ready to adopt lines of thought, and of action, opposed to God's will, when they have been suggested to them ; and thus it comes to pass that human society, on however large or small a scale it may exist, adopts the tone of thought, the modes of expression, and the lines of action, of those who influence it, and in this way what we term public opinion is formed ; and if that public opinion be such as to lead men to think, speak, and act, without any reference to God ; if it lead men to live lives, which either ignore Him, or oppose His laws ; then that is the public opinion of 'the world, the foe of the soul.'

And it should be remembered that to live apart

from God is to live in antagonism to God, for our blessed Lord Jesus Christ said, 'He that is not with Me is against Me.'

We think then that the world may be defined as being 'human society, in so far as it is living apart from, or in antagonism to, God.' That is the world, the enemy of the soul, and as represented by it 'the ungodly bend their bow, and make ready their arrows within the quiver : that they may privily shoot at them which are true of heart.'

The world thus understood brings its evil influence to bear against the Church of Christ and her teaching. The world has its views about the Church of God. It has its views about religion. It does not always openly profess to be altogether irreligious. It is not its policy entirely to ignore religion, or religious questions ; on the contrary, at times, and in certain ways, it rather affects to patronise religion ; but it must be a religion to its own liking, for it will only tolerate a so-called religion, which shall be without mystery and without dogma, if indeed there could be such a thing. The world affects to ignore the supernatural in religion. It likes to have the varnish of respectability which, from its point of view, a certain outward observance of religion gives to society. But it goes no deeper than that. It does not like to be reminded of sin, or of punishment due to sin, and it knows nothing of the converting power of grace ; it knows nothing of the broken and contrite heart, nothing of the confession of sin. It will say in a general and offhand manner : 'Oh, yes, we are, of course, all miserable sinners ;' but it does not mean it. It knows nothing of the true confession of sin, nor of the blessed peace and freedom of

absolution, nothing of real self-sacrifice in the amendment of life.

To the world the Church of God is a fairly useful agency for maintaining decorum, and for teaching morals, but a merely human institution, with a great many arrangements and customs, which, however good and fitting they may have been in past ages, are now, in the face of all the universal progress in knowledge and refinement, rapidly becoming less and less suited to the requirements of the age in which we live. That is the world's view of the Church; it acknowledges nothing of her Divine character, as the mystical body of the crucified, risen, ascended, and glorified Christ, indwelt by God the Holy Ghost, and by Him filled with spiritual life, energy, and power. It does not acknowledge her as the Divinely appointed teacher of truth, or as the supreme authority in matters of faith.

To the world the Blessed Sacraments are but pious superstitions which do not concern it; the world looks upon them as merely outward symbolical acts, all very well, no doubt, for those who choose to take part in them, but which are not intended for all, and are of no vital importance to anyone; or if it do grudgingly admit that there may be something peculiarly solemn about these Blessed Sacraments, it will add that there is a virtue in ignoring them unless one is good enough to take part in them; and, further, that, inasmuch as there would be an absurd assumption of pride in supposing oneself good enough to take part in them, therefore it is more virtuous to ignore them altogether. That is the world's view of the matter. It will hear nothing of the Sacraments as being the means whereby God the Holy Ghost supernaturally imparts, strengthens, and maintains that living

union with the crucified, risen, and ascended Christ—that union in, and by, which alone life can be lived for God. Thus it tries to hinder us from obtaining grace and power at these fountains opened for us.

The world brings the tyranny of its public opinion to bear upon us, to drive us back from all ‘the wells of salvation.’

Public worship is to the world a duty only in so far as it is imposed by the usages of society and the requirements of respectability. It is not recognised by the world as a paramount duty to God. The view that the world takes of the duty of attending the public worship of God is really this: ‘It is a duty which I owe to society, or to my position, to be seen at church, but were it not for the claims society thus has on me I need not go to church at all.’

Again, the Ten Commandments are to the world a fairly reasonable code of morality, one against which it does not profess to have anything to urge. It practically ignores the first table of the Commandments, as being a set of rules which cannot much concern it, since, from its point of view, they are rules directed against certain superstitions, and breaches of good taste and manners, which it assumes are not very likely to occur in the present day, and therefore it looks upon these rules as somewhat obsolete. With regard to the second table, the world is quite ready to condemn any gross breach of the rules there laid down, if such breach of them interfere with its ease and comfort, or if, being found out, it cause any disturbing scandal. But even then it has more pleasure in satisfying an evil curiosity with the details of the crime, than it has sorrow of heart over the sin that has been committed.

That is very much the view which the world takes of the Ten Commandments. And the world brings all the evil influence of this view of God's law to bear against us as we seek for the increase of grace in the faithful discharge of duty to God and man.

So, again, it is in the case of the three eminent good works which our blessed Lord taught us to practise, viz. prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

The world ridicules prayer as an idle superstition. 'If there be a God,' says the world—'and we do not deny it—He may be, as you say He is, omnipotent, omniscient, and all-loving; but if He be omniscient, then He knows what you want, and if He be omnipotent and all-loving He will grant it without your asking, and therefore prayer is useless.' Or, again, the world will say something of this kind: 'If there be a God—and we do not deny that there is—and if He be, as you say He is, the ruler as well as the maker of all things—if He rule by laws which He has made, is it not somewhat presumptuous to expect Him to change those laws at your request? Is it likely that He would do it? So that here again prayer is useless; it is nothing but an idle superstition.'

That is the world's view of prayer.

Fasting is to the world the most foolish of all practices. To it self-denial in this form appears to be simply absurd. Enjoy the present, and enjoy it to the full, is its teaching. 'Let us eat and drink,' even though 'tomorrow we die.'

Almsgiving, as a duty and more especially as a privilege, finds no more favour in the eyes of the world than does either prayer or fasting. It is quite true that the world will give liberally, and even largely, at times, to philanthropic purposes, when it is touched by some

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special appeal, or when some great need is forcibly brought before its notice, but, even then, it must 'sound its trumpet before it,' and it must see its name in the subscription list. It must have its money's worth of credit for not being altogether heartless. But it knows nothing of that spirit of almsgiving of which our blessed Lord Jesus Christ spoke when he said, 'Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.' It knows nothing of systematic almsgiving as a duty and as a privilege. It knows nothing of our Lord's saying, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Thus the world tries to hinder our prayers, to make us careless in the great matter of self-control of the body, and rob us of the blessing of almsgiving.

The world attacks us in our home life, whence it ever tries to banish all direct mention of God and of Divine things.

It assails men in their business life. It brings all its influence to bear to make men accept, as their standard, its own measures of right and wrong, and its own code of commercial morality, instead of that which God has fixed and determined. It is ever striving to introduce into business life some such laxity of principle as this—'This or that transaction may not be altogether straight or strictly right, but it is always done. Others do it, and so why should not you? It does not do to be too particular,' and so on.

The world sees no danger in temptation ; it does not discover any wrong in sin, unless it be found out, but then, though very tender with sin, it is terribly hard on the sinner. Sin, in its eyes, is only sinful when it is found out, but the sin of being found out is unpardonable in its sight.

In every vocation in life what the world aims at is to make men adopt, and act upon, its own estimate of things, that is to say, an estimate founded upon considerations of the present, to the entire exclusion of the future, life.

The world, again, is ever endeavouring to destroy the true character of recreation and amusement. All such things are, in themselves, good and useful so long as they really tend to such true recreation of the body or of the mind, as makes us the better able to discharge our duties and to do our work ; but the world comes in to rob us of the true benefit of recreation, by turning such things into the very business of life, and leading us to desire life with no higher aim than to be amused.

The world attacks us in our inmost thoughts, in the exercise of the understanding, the affections and the will. It clouds over the future, and lights up the present only. 'Set your affections on these things which you can enjoy now in the present,' it says, and so it strives to stop our ears from hearing the tender, earnest pleading of God, 'My son, give me thine heart,' and to the exhortation of the Apostle : 'If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above.' 'Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth ; for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.'

The world is, beyond all question, a very terrible foe ; but it is not invincible. Our blessed Lord Jesus Christ has conquered it. He tells us Himself, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation ; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'

And the apostle, St. John, tells us, 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

Ah, yes ! if only we would live the faith which we profess and hold, we should overcome the world.

There is the kingdom of this world, and there is the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of this world is ruled by Satan, who is 'the prince of this world.' The world may not choose to acknowledge it, but the fact remains that he does rule it. It is he that prompts the pride and selfishness that lie at the root of all the world's unwritten but acknowledged laws. It is he that suggests all the miserably contracted and limited views of life, which bring about its low and unworthy estimates of all things. It is he that sets before men all those low, mean, groveling and contemptible aims and ambitions which in the kingdom of the world they weary themselves in pursuing. It is he that shuts out the great future, and lights up the present with an unnatural glare, so that men who 'have eyes' yet 'see not.' He is the prince of this world. He came, and he found nothing in our blessed Lord, for the Sinless One 'overcame the world.'

And there is, too, the kingdom of God : the kingdom of which Jesus Christ is King. The laws of that kingdom are the laws of God. There, in all the means of grace help to keep these laws is given. There, the true estimate of things is taught. There, the highest and the noblest aims and ambitions are kept steadily before us. There, the clear light of the future is continually thrown upon the present, revealing to us the things of time as they really are. There, right is right, and wrong is wrong. There, is hatred of sin, but love and help for the sinner. There, is to be found peace of soul in this life, and eternal happiness hereafter.

The one kingdom is transitory, the other is eternal,

for 'the world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

Do not let us deceive ourselves in this matter. We cannot belong to both kingdoms. We cannot belong to the kingdom of the world, living the life of the world, that is, a life lived apart from or in antagonism to God, and at the same time belong to the kingdom of God, living the life subject to the laws of that kingdom, a life lived in union with Jesus Christ its king.

We are citizens of the kingdom of God; never let us forget it. It is for us to be loyal subjects, it is for us to fight manfully against the kingdom of the world and to overcome it.

'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.' Let us live the faith which we profess. Would that we realised as we should do the power of such a life!

What is the faith we profess? Faith in God, the Three in One; the Father who made us by His power; the Son who redeemed us by His Blood; the Holy Ghost who sanctifies us by His grace. A faith which believes in the fact that God created us that He might love us, and loving us, designed our happiness. That He Created us that we might be happy. That He Redeemed us that happiness might be possible for us. That He sanctifies us that happiness may be restored to us, and so His glory may be manifested. Ah, if we did but keep this ever in mind!

What is the faith we profess? A faith that believes the Church to be the mystical body of Christ, indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, instinct with all spiritual life and power, teaching God's truth, administering the

Blessed Sacraments to the glory of God and for the salvation of souls. Ah, if only we lived that faith!

What is the faith we profess? A faith that believes in the forgiveness of sins, and ever seeks it in true repentance. A faith that believes in the great judgment that inevitably awaits us, and that strives day by day to live as in the full light of that judgment. A faith that sees in the home the training place for heaven, and in the work of life the opportunity of serving God. A faith that believes in eternal life, 'the reward of those who hold the faith and live as true Christians.'

'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

The life that is lived by that faith is a life guarded by 'the shield of faith which is able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked,' and against such a life it is in vain that 'the ungodly bend their bow, and make ready their arrows within the quiver: that they may privily shoot at them which are true of heart.'

V.

THE FLESH, THE FOE OF THE SOUL.

‘Lusts which war against the soul.’—1 ST. PETER ii. 11.

THE archers whose noise is heard at the wells of salvation, and whose arrows fall there thick and fast, and who are ever trying to hinder us from drawing grace therefrom, range themselves as we have said under one or other of the three great leaders, whose names have been familiar to us from childhood as the enemies of the soul, viz. the devil, the world, and the flesh.

We have already said that the first of these, the devil, is ‘a created spirit, a personal being, who has deliberately set his whole will in opposition to the will of God ; and remaining permanently in this rebellion, is ever seeking to draw others into its ranks.’ He is the first, the personal, and the external foe of the soul.

Then follows the kingdom over which he reigns, the world, and all the attractions, the influence, the power and the tyranny, of the world ; and we have described the world in the sense in which it is the foe of the soul, as being ‘human society in so far as it is living apart from, or in antagonism to, God.’ Here is the second of these enemies, an impersonal foe, both internal and external, for it attacks us from within as well as from without.

And now we come to speak of the third of these great enemies whose efforts are ever directed to placing hindrances in our way as we strive, by the grace of God, to live the spiritual life, and so to regain happiness to His glory.

The flesh. Now what do we mean when we speak of the flesh as the foe of the soul ?

At first sight it might appear that the expression merely meant the setting of the material against the spiritual nature. That the body and the soul were necessarily in antagonism. But this is not so. In man the material and the spiritual are united. They should be one in doing the will of God. 'The reasonable soul and flesh is one man.' 'Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.'

The flesh as the enemy of the soul may be defined as being 'human nature ruled by the senses, under the sway of unregulated desire.' That we conceive to be a true definition of the flesh in the sense of its being the foe of the spiritual life.

We will now devote a few moments to the consideration of this definition before we go on to see how the flesh is the seat of those 'lusts which war against the soul.'

We say, then, that the flesh is 'human nature ruled by the senses under the sway of unregulated desire.' Now, desire in itself, pure and simple, is and must be good. It is one of the gifts of God. It was implanted in man's nature when God first created him very good. It was implanted in man that it might be the internal personal power which should move him to action, whether physical, moral, or spiritual. Without desire man would have been a mere listless machine – no movement of body,

soul, or spirit would have taken place. Desire fixes purpose, kindles enthusiasm, prompts action, braces energy, sustains zeal and directs movement. Desire is to man what the fair wind of heaven is to the ship as it fills her sails, and moves her safely and swiftly on her path across the ocean ; but without which she would lie idly tossed hither and thither as the waves struck and buffeted her.

Desire may be, and was intended to be, under the guiding of the Holy Spirit, that which should move man to find the satisfaction of his soul in God. ' Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God.' ' My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord ; my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.' When it is thus, then desire is the fair wind that carries the soul across the troublesome waves of this world to the haven where it would be.

But unregulated desire, desire unguided and uncontrolled by the Holy Spirit, is the hurricane that drives the soul to shipwreck, dashing it upon the rocks and utterly destroying it. ' If ye live after the flesh ye shall die.'

The flesh, then, as the enemy of the soul, is ' human nature ruled by the senses under the sway of unregulated desire.' It is God's order of things entirely reversed.

Let us for a moment, even at the risk of incurring the charge of tedious repetition, go back to the thought of man's condition as he was originally created by God.

Perfect in all respects, man possessed a body with its five senses, a soul with its powers of memory, understanding, and will, and a spirit with its conscience.

The conscience, taught of God and speaking God's will, was to have controlled desire, enlightened the understanding, kindled the affections and directed the will. The will in its turn was to have ruled the body and the senses, through which obedience was to have been manifested in the outer world of action. And so long as man's powers were, by the exercise of grace, thus held in due subordination to God's will all went well. But the moment sin came into man's life all this harmony of action was destroyed, and he lost the gift of integrity whereby it had hitherto been maintained.

The will of man having rebelled against that of God, in its turn lost control over desire, and over the lower nature, and no longer ruled the bodily senses; the will being now itself corrupted, it was rebelled against and dethroned, and the whole nature of man became the scene of confusion and anarchy. God's order was completely reversed, and the senses assumed the rule under the sway of unregulated desire.

Now we know and feel that this is, and must be, an evil thing; we condemn it at once when it comes before us in any gross form. We utterly despise the man who is manifestly a slave to his passions; one whose whole life is ruled by the senses, whose will has lost all control over the sensual life. Whenever we are brought face to face with this evil thing, in any such gross form, whenever we see one in whom the low selfish nature has altogether obtained the mastery over what ought to be the higher and unselfish part of him, we at once condemn it as an evil thing.

Such a man is no longer worthy of the name of man. The will gone and the senses ruling him entirely, he has given up his freedom, he has sunk down into the most

degraded of all forms of slavery, he is living after the flesh ; and in a case of this kind we see that the flesh is his enemy, an enemy by whom he has been conquered. And we do, at once, see that it is an evil thing for a man to be in that condition wherein he is an example of 'human nature ruled by the senses under the sway of unregulated desire.'

But St. Paul goes very far beyond saying that this condition of things is an evil. He uses an expression of very terrible energy in speaking of it. He says, 'If ye live after the flesh ye shall die.' 'To be carnally minded is death.' He calls this condition of 'human nature ruled by the senses under the sway of unregulated desire,' death.

Are we for a moment to suppose that St. Paul, in speaking thus, is using the language of exaggeration, in order to frighten men back from that of which he would warn them? Can we for a moment believe that he is treating those to whom he is speaking as foolish parents sometimes treat their children, by threatening them with consequences utterly out of proportion to the action they would keep them from?—treatment, by the way, which ever fails to produce the result desired.—Oh, no, certainly not. The more we think over that statement of St. Paul's, and the more we examine it, the more will its terrible truth assert itself.

'If ye live after the flesh ye shall die.' There are various orders of life, and so also are there various orders of death. There is physical life, there is intellectual life, there is moral life, social life, and there is spiritual life, and in each of these it is true that 'If ye live after the flesh ye shall die.'

Living after the flesh leads to physical death. What

is the very foundation, so to speak, on which physical life is based? It is bodily health, is it not? Well, to live after the flesh is to destroy the bodily health, and although it is quite true that we shall all die, yet death, the termination of physical life, the separation of body and soul, is distinctly courted and hastened on by indulging the sinful lusts of the flesh, and even in this sense it is true that 'If ye live after the flesh ye shall die.'

But beyond this there is the case of intellectual death. What is it that lies at the root of intellectual life? It is the quickness, clearness, and vigour of all the powers of thought, memory, reason, understanding, and imagination; but to live after the flesh is to bring about, in a greater or less degree, confused thought, impaired memory, shattered reason, obscured understanding, and corrupted imagination; and all these things lead up to that intellectual death which, sooner or later, finally ensues.

Again, there is moral death. What is that upon which the moral life is built up, and upon which it rests? Surely it is principle. Truth and duty are to rule my life, apart from any question of pleasure or profit. But to live after the flesh is to throw over truth and duty altogether, for the sake of pleasure and profit. Principle is thereby destroyed, and moral death follows.

There then comes the question of the social life; here above all the truth of the Apostle's saying is so manifestly and so clearly illustrated that it may be seen and read by all: 'If ye live after the flesh ye shall die.'

Love is the foundation of the pure, holy, unselfish, social life. When love dies the heart of the social life has ceased to beat; and to live after the flesh is to wound,

to weaken, to crush, and finally to kill love. It is to stamp it out altogether, and the social life in which love no longer exists is dead. Who can doubt it? Look for a moment at the repulsive sight of the so-called social life of the man who has become the slave of his passions, and whose only aim in life is to satisfy the jaded appetites, which no longer yield to him even the miserable fruits of present enjoyment which they once bore. Look at the home of the drunkard, look at the social life of that home—can it be said to be aught but dead? Step by step love has taken its departure; first the bonds of true love were loosened, and their power was broken as the crown of manly dignity and respect was lost. Then they were cast away as the hope of reformation was again and again disappointed. At length fear entered in, and love was banished. Even pity, at last, took her flight from that miserable home, where brutal selfishness was allowed to reign supreme. ‘Wine that maketh glad the heart of man’ abused till it lost its power to gladden, and could no longer do aught save minister to ever-increasing depression and despair. Oh, the misery and the gloom of it! Everything that made life bright—respect, esteem, honour, affection, love—all killed. Ah, yes! the social life is dead. ‘If ye live after the flesh ye shall die.’

And then, lastly, there is the great question of the spiritual life, the daily life lived in union with Jesus Christ. Conscience enlightened by the Holy Spirit is the guide of the spiritual life. Faith, hope, love, are the attendant virtues of the spiritual life. Prayer is the breath of the spiritual life. God’s Word is the light of the spiritual life. The Sacraments are the medicine and the food of the spiritual life.

But to live after the flesh is to shut all these out of the life, to destroy them or their effects on the soul. Conscience, again and again trifled with and disobeyed, at last ceases to speak. Faith shaken is made shipwreck of. Hope no longer entering 'into that within the veil' no longer leads upwards. Love has ceased since duty to God and man have been abandoned. Prayer no longer supplies the atmosphere of heaven for the soul to breathe. God's Word, a closed book, no longer gives forth the light for the soul to walk by. The Sacraments neglected, no longer supply to the soul its necessary medicine and food. The spiritual life dies out step by step, and at last the sickness ends in spiritual death. Ah, yes! the lusts of the flesh do war against the soul. 'If ye live after the flesh ye shall die.'

'Human nature ruled by the senses under the sway of unregulated desire' is a very terrible foe, and it is always on the watch to attack us at 'the wells of salvation.'

We go on to notice some of the ways in which it does this.

The flesh will try to make us neglect the worship of God and the use of the Sacraments. It will endeavour to hinder us by putting all kinds of obstacles in the way of our prayers or it will prompt us to ask amiss. There is a terrible meaning in the words of St. James as he points out to us this danger: 'Ye ask and have not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts' or 'pleasures.'

The flesh attacks us in the family and the home life, often through what ought to be the very highest and noblest of our affections. It is the same story over and over again. Truth and duty must give way to pleasure.

Hardship must be avoided at all risks, so that ease be secured. 'Gratify the senses: let self-denial for the good of others give place to self-indulgence.' 'Take thine ease—eat, drink, and be merry: ' 'take your own ease, seek your own comfort, do just what you please, apart from all question of the good of others.' And thus the flesh strives to hinder our obtaining grace as we seek it in all the purity and the love; in the repose and the gentleness of the home life.

In society, in our amusements and in our recreations it assails us with its persistent temptation.

It attacks us, too, through the exercise of our intellectual faculties. It is, alas! a fact so manifest that it cannot be denied, that a large proportion, and we sadly fear an increasing proportion, of the literature of the day—the books, periodicals, magazines, and newspapers,—is enlisted on the side of the flesh; not, perhaps, openly or professedly, not with the coarseness and vulgarity which marked the literature of some former times, and which would, probably, shock the susceptibilities of the greater refinement of to-day. But there it is, notwithstanding its more decent dress, still on the side of the flesh, on the side of 'human nature ruled by the senses, under the sway of unregulated desire,' wounding with its poisonous arrows, the memory and, the imagination.

And in the business life its arrows fall thickly and fast. Gain and profit, the desire to grow rich, and to grow rich quickly and by any means, is the aim it often sets forth as the one thing to be sought after, and to be sought after without any definite reference to that truth, and that high sense of duty, which ought to govern the activities of work and business.

Ah, yes! the flesh is a terrible foe, and we all know

something of its power ; though, thank God, we may never as yet have felt its full force, and, by His grace, we may never fall under the power of its grinding tyranny. Still, we know enough of it to realise that it is a terrible foe to the soul.

Let us fight manfully against it, as we are pledged to do. Let us pray for grace. Let us listen to conscience, and never give up the contest ; never admit that we are beaten. We may receive blows that will stagger us ; we may fall again and again, but it must be to rise, and to rise again and again from our knees, with renewed strength, to continue the battle. We must 'endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.'

Never let us weary of making fresh beginnings. There must be many of them in the spiritual life ; nay, it is made up of them. Remember that perseverance lies in ever making new beginnings. Perseverance is a thing of the moment, of every moment as it comes. It is not a question of the victory we won yesterday—that is gone, but it is safe with God ; nor is it a question of what we shall do to-morrow—that is in God's knowledge ; but it is a question of what we are doing now, at this moment, and at each moment as it comes and goes. Ah, how watchful we ought to be ! 'Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.'

Let us practise prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Let us ask ourselves how far we have ever exercised in fasting the power to control the flesh even in the commonplace matter of eating and drinking. Have we ever really tested our power, by grace, to keep under the body and bring it into subjection ? It is not without reference to the subduing of the flesh that the Church has ordered times of abstinence and fasting ; and certainly,

apart from the very serious question of obedience to the laws of the Church, we lose much strength in the spiritual life if we neglect to observe these periods of abstinence and fasting which the Church has ordered.

Let us watch the beginnings of the attacks of the flesh. Is there anything in our lives now that we feel is getting the upper hand? if so let us break with it at once. Never let us become the slaves of a self-indulgent habit, no matter how free from gross sin it may appear to be. The only true wisdom is to break it off at once, before it begins to exercise its terrible tyranny.

Let us remember, too, that together with the awful warning, 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die,' comes the blessed promise, 'but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.' And the truth of the promise is as certain as that of the warning.

In all those orders of life in which we have traced death as due to living after the flesh, life is to be won by mortifying the deeds of the body through the power of the Holy Spirit. Bodily life, freed from many of the miseries brought about by undue indulgence of the appetites and passions, will be stronger and more healthful. Intellectual life will be raised to its highest exercise. Moral life will be possessed in its purest form. Social life will be enjoyed in its happiest relations. And spiritual life will be maintained in its union with God through Jesus Christ.

God's grace is sufficient. God's grace is freely offered. Let us seek it and let us use it.

Let us remember St. Paul's experience, both of the struggle and of the victory: 'I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I

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have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.'

He had to undergo the struggle, as we have all of us to do. But he could also give this as his experience. 'The life which I now live in the flesh'—not after the flesh, but in the flesh—'I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.'

He had the same struggle that we have, and we have the same almighty help that he had, for the Son of God loved us and gave Himself for us.

And St. Paul, for our encouragement, tells us this by the inspiration of God: 'If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.'

III.

Resolutions of the *Spiritual Life*.

- I. THE ATTENTIVE EAR.
- II. THE THOUGHTFUL MIND.
- III. THE THANKFUL HEART.
- IV. THE HOPEFUL SPIRIT.
- V. THE LOYAL WILL.

I.

THE ATTENTIVE EAR.

‘I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.’

PSALM lxxxv. 8.

THE spiritual life—that is to say, the ordinary daily life lived in union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ—has as its end and aim the glory of God promoted by, and manifested in, the happiness of man.

That man may, through this life, attain to that end God has, in His mercy and love, provided all the help and the strength man needs. The Church, the Sacraments, and all the means of grace are placed by God within man’s reach ; and besides these all the circumstances of life are so many ‘wells of salvation’ whence God wills that man should draw daily supplies of grace.

Around all these sources of grace the enemies of the soul, the devil, the world, and the flesh, gather in order to hinder it from obtaining grace.

Now that the battle may be constantly and effectually maintained, the purpose of the Christian’s life, viz. ‘to do the will of God,’ must be supported by definite resolutions, calmly made and steadily adhered to.

We propose now to speak of some of these resolutions. There should be in the spiritual life the attentive ear, the thoughtful mind, the thankful heart, the

hopeful spirit, and the loyal will. And we will now go on to speak of them in this order :

First, then, there must be the attentive ear : ' I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.'

Now, St. James gives us this short lesson ; he says, ' Be swift to hear, slow to speak.' And an old writer, in commenting upon this text, somewhat quaintly makes remarks to the following effect :

' Nature herself teaches the same lesson as the Apostle, for nature has left the ears always open that men may be swift to hear ; she has put two shutters to the eyes that they may be less ready to see ; and she has barred in the tongue with the gates of the teeth and the doors of the lips, that they may be slow to speak ; but men, for the most part, are so perverse that they will not learn the lesson which nature would thus teach them, and they are far more ready to see than to hear, and swifter to speak than to do either.'

Yes, nature, St. James, and the Psalmist, all teach us the same lesson. Nature by leaving the ears open, ever fitted to hear ; St. James when he says, ' Be swift to hear ;' and the Psalmist as he declares this to be his life's resolution, ' I will hearken.' He would be swift to hear ; so must we be.

But here a word of caution is needed, for it is quite possible to be swift to hear to one's sorrow and to one's hurt. The avenue through which sin, sorrow, and misery have come into the world, and into the lives of men, has ever been this, viz., the hearkening to what should not have been listened to.

Eve hearkened to the serpent, Adam hearkened to Eve, and sin entered into the world. Absalom hearkened to Ahithophel and it led to most awful sin. Solomon

hearkened to his wives and it led to his downfall. Rehoboam hearkened to the vain young men with whom he had surrounded himself, and the kingdom was divided. Ahab hearkened to that miserable woman Jezebel, who was the bane of his life, and every movement in him towards repentance was checked. And so it is all along throughout the history, case after case occurs in which it is to be seen that sin, sorrow, and misery have come into the lives of men through their having hearkened to that which ought never to have been listened to. It has been thus ever since that readiness to listen was the avenue through which the tempter approached our first parents with his poison of sin.

And we all know something of this sorrow, do we not? Who is there, alas! who does not know something of the pain, and the misery, of the soul polluted, of memory stained, of faith weakened, of imagination defiled, of resolution broken, or of virtue overcome, by having hearkened to something which ought not to have been listened to? Do we not know that just those things, which we would now give everything we possess never to have heard, are the very things which, with a strange and evil tenacity, cling to the memory, and recur to it again and again, just at those times when of all others we would fain forget them?

Our memory is a marvellously strange and delicate instrument; we can by our own will put almost anything into it, but we cannot by any effort of our own will ever take anything out of it. That is to say, we cannot deliberately say to ourselves, 'I will forget this or that,' and straightway do so. Nay, the more we strive to forget the more persistently does the thought,

for the most part, remain. God's grace alone can purge the memory from stain of evil.

So, though it be good to hearken and to be swift to hear ; though it be right to make this our life's resolution, 'I will hearken ;' yet, as we carry out that resolution, we must bear in mind our blessed Lord's warning, 'Take heed what ye hear.'

The Psalmist, however, is a safe guide, for he says not only 'I will hearken ;' but he goes further and adds, 'I will hearken what the Lord God will say.'

This must be safe and right. Yes, but even here a warning is needed ; for it is by no means an uncommon thing to find people who are quite ready to hearken to what God says, as they think, about others ; it is a very common thing to find people very ready to quote Holy Scripture in reproof of others, or in depreciation of others ; it is a matter of frequent occurrence to find people who are quite ready to listen to some of the things which God says, and at the same time to close their ears altogether to other things which He says, but which are not to their taste, interfering as they do with their wishes or desires. Thus they come to have a very partial, narrow, and contracted gospel, instead of the glorious gospel of the blessed God. So that even here, when we make our resolution and say, 'I will hearken what the Lord God will say,' we must still bear in mind our blessed Lord's warning, 'Take heed how ye hear.'

But the Psalmist is indeed a safe guide, for he goes on to say, 'I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.'

Ah ! that is the true wisdom. That is the true spirit in which, and the true purpose with which, to hearken to His holy Word. That is what each of us really needs

and wants to know, 'what He will say concerning me.' That is the knowledge we need, is it not?

I need to know, and I long to know, what He says about my own personal life, about my soul, about my duty in all its various directions, about my life, with all its cares, difficulties and responsibilities, about my hopes, my fears, my destiny.

'I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.'

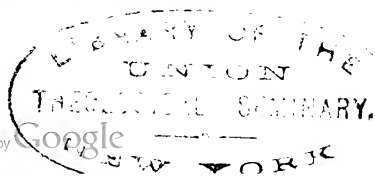
That is the true spirit in which to read and study Holy Scripture.

Not, as is too commonly done, in a spirit of criticism, not to find out what God has, or what He has not, said about this, or that, little point of science, which, in our foolish pride, we think that we have mastered; not as some men, alas! do, to try and prove that God is wrong, or that he has made a mistake; not to try and make God's revelation agree with our own already formed conclusions. But in all humility, with sincerity of purpose, and with a firm determination to profit by it, and to obey, to 'hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.'

May God in His love and mercy give to each of us grace to hearken thus to his message with attentive ear!

Let us now go on to consider some few of these things which God says, of which we may each say, 'I will hearken to that, for that is said concerning me.' They are but samples of the rest; the Word of God is full of them from beginning to end.

First, then, with this determination, 'I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me,' I turn to the revealed Word of God; and I find Him saying by the mouth of His holy prophet, 'I have loved thee with an



everlasting love.' Now every one of us can say of that 'It is said concerning me.'

What a marvellous mystery is contained in that glorious statement, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love'! To what a platform of dignity, and blessedness, does that raise each individual soul!

Before creation, from all eternity, each soul was the object of the love of the Three in One.

Even in that far-off past, ere there existed either angels, or sun, moon, stars, earth, or man; ere even space itself was, when there was nothing but the Eternal God Himself, self-existent in His all-sufficing bliss; even then the whole work of creation, in all its marvellous beauty of grandeur and of detail, had, so far as will, purpose, and intention went, been worked out for me. 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love.'

Even then, in the eternal councils of the Almighty, the whole work of redemption in all its wondrous humility and sufferings, had been, so far as will, purpose, and intention went, wrought out for me by the 'Lamb slain before the foundation of the world.'

'I have loved thee with an everlasting love.'

Even then, the Holy Spirit's work, in all the mysteries of sanctification, was, so far as will, purpose, and intention went, worked out for me.

'I have loved thee with an everlasting love.'

Created, redeemed, sanctified, that God might love me, that I might love Him, that loving Him and being loved by Him, I might be eternally happy in union with Him through Jesus Christ, I have been the object of the love of the Blessed Trinity from all eternity.

But then, alas! as I look around me upon the great field of human life, crowded as it is with these souls, so

loved from all eternity, I see sorrow, misery, wretchedness, suffering and death ; I see, on all sides, men courting death—physical, moral, and spiritual death. As I look into my own heart, I see there so little love of the God who has thus loved me ; I see so much that is other than it should be ; I fall so far short of what I know I ought to be and of what I would be, that in my perplexity I ask, How can all this be consistent with the truth of the fact that ‘God has loved me with an everlasting love’? Again, then, I determine that, in this difficulty, ‘I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me,’ and turning again to the Book of His Word I find Him saying, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.’

Ah ! all this sin, all this sorrow, all this death, is no part of His plan. He has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.

Oh, no ! for I hear him speaking again and saying, ‘God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ And that saying of His contains the promise to me.

And then, as I go on and think of the Incarnate Son of God working out that great salvation for me ; as I mark His steps as He draws nearer and nearer to the great final act of obedience that crowned His life of sacrifice ; as I see Him nailed to the Cross, by my sins, and for my sins, I hear Him cry, ‘Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do.’

And I know that that prayer is offered to the Father for me. I know that it is said concerning me ; for as I sinned, alas ! I knew not what I did ; but I do know that that prayer is said concerning me, the ignorant, but now

penitent, sinner. I know that henceforth, if only I will seek it aright, there is now forgiveness for me.

But still I want something more, even yet. Though forgiven, I know that there is still a remaining penalty for sin that I must undergo. There still lies before me a great mystery which I am compelled to face. There meets me still the awful question of death ; I must die, and before I enter death's dark portals my soul yearns for some light, for some knowledge of what lies beyond the grave. Again I turn to God's Word that I may 'hearken what He will say concerning me' as to this great mystery of death, and I find Him saying, 'I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live : and whosoever that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.'

And then, to crown it all, there comes from my blessed Saviour, in His risen, ascended, and glorified life, another saying spoken straight home to me, 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'

Ah, what splendid sayings are these spoken concerning me ! A set of pearls strung together, each adding beauty to the other, all united with 'the one Pearl of great price.'

Yes, indeed, they are splendid sayings.

'I have loved thee with an everlasting love.'

'I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.'

'God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'

'I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live : and whosoever that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.'

‘Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.’

But splendid sayings though they be, it is not enough to listen to them merely as to a sweet song, which for the moment charms the ear and soothes the soul. If these sayings be true, and I know that they are true ; if God has loved me with an everlasting love ; if He has no pleasure in my death ; if He has so loved me as to give His only begotten Son to die for me ; if the eternal Son of God, through His incarnation, His passion, and His death, has obtained forgiveness for me ; if there is eternal life beyond the grave for me, and a crown of glory laid up in store for me in that eternal life—if all this be really true, and I know that it is true, then this must have a practical bearing upon my life.

I cannot go on living as though all this were but a dream, and not a reality. If all this is done for me, what must I do ? What is my duty ?

‘I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me,’ as to this matter of duty.

With this determination, I again turn to the Word of God, and find His saying this : ‘Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ That is said concerning me, and if I am honest in my resolution, I shall repent ; that is, I will be sorry for my sins, I will confess them to God, and I will strive my utmost by His grace to amend my life.

Again, he says : ‘If ye love Me, keep my commandments.’ I know that that, too, is said concerning me, for I do love Him. Would that I loved Him more than I do ! But I do love Him, and, therefore, I must keep His commandments. And I know perfectly well what these

commandments are. They are the Ten Commandments which I have known from my childhood.

I know what God says about my duty ; but there is another difficulty which meets me. It is the same of which we have already spoken. How can I keep God's commandments? I am so weak ; I am conscious of the fact, that, try as I may, I am always failing ; of myself I cannot keep them. Once more then, I turn to God's Word as to this difficulty, and I find Him saying, ' Ask and ye shall have.' I know quite well what that means. It means that I am to pray for grace. He says also, ' This do in remembrance of Me,' and I know perfectly well what that means. It means that I am to seek, in Holy Communion, the strength I need in order to keep God's commandments.

Now, if I am really in earnest I shall do these things.

Here we have these promises given, duties laid down, and the way to perform them pointed out. Let us make our resolution to obey. ' I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.'

We go on now to notice that God speaks to us concerning ourselves in other ways as well as in the Book of His revealed Word.

He speaks to us all concerning ourselves through the voice of conscience, by the voice of the Church, by the beauties of nature, and by the marvels of science. Here too our resolution should be, ' I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.'

And then there is yet another way, in which He speaks to us concerning ourselves—though it is one in which we are often but very slow to hear His voice, viz., in all that strange, and often sad, admixture of good and

evil, joy, sorrow, pleasure and pain which makes up what we call the discipline of life.

What is the meaning of life's discipline? All the answers that can be given to that question practically resolve themselves into these three. It is either the outcome of an iron destiny which nothing can divert from its path; or it is the sport of a blind and idle chance which nothing can control; or it is what we Christians, who believe that 'not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our Father,' and that the very 'hairs of our heads are all numbered,' believe and hold it to be—viz. the path by which an all-loving and almighty Father is, step by step, leading His children to Himself.

Take God's loving hand out of the discipline of life, refuse to listen to His voice speaking through it, and then it becomes something too dark and too terrible to face. But hear Him speaking through it to the soul, and the whole aspect of the question is changed; that which seemed to be so harsh and so cruel is then seen to be 'most wonderfully kind,' and that which before was so drear and so dark becomes full of brightness as it is lit up by the glorious light of the love of the Almighty.

For instance: a mother loses her little child; the hand of death has been laid upon the little one, around whom she has entwined all the affections of her heart with a passionate fervour; and as she lays her darling in its last resting place, all life seems to her so drear, and so grey, and so sad, that, heart-broken, she is tempted to rebel against this part of life's discipline, to rebel against the will of God that has laid this sorrow upon her heart; and the temptation is a very terrible one, the temptation to say in her secret thoughts, if not with her lips, 'How can God be good and loving, when He has taken

from me the one innocent thing that I loved with all my heart'?

Ah! if such a mourner, at such a time, in such a sorrow, would but say to herself, 'I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me' in this sorrow—surely she would hear the blessed Saviour's voice speaking, in loving accents, the words which He once spake on earth, though with slightly different meaning, 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not.'

Or again, how common a thing it is for a man to have looked forward to, toiled, and waited for something or other, which was, as he thought, to make all life bright and happy for him—to have set his whole heart upon it; something, it may be, quite innocent in itself, but something upon which he had set his affections, to the exclusion of God; and then when it seemed that the hopes of a lifetime were on the point of being realised, that which had been so long, and so earnestly, hoped for is snatched from him; and then comes the temptation to rebel and to 'charge God foolishly.' Yet, if the voice of God were hearkened to in such a trial, it would, beyond all doubt, be heard speaking in tones of calm, firm, and earnest entreaty, and saying, 'My son, give Me thine heart.'

Or take another case, which is by no means uncommon. Take the case of one who has worked hard, diligently, and honestly through life, and his toil has been rewarded by his having gathered together a sufficiency of wealth; ease for his declining years seems to have been secured, when suddenly there comes some financial or commercial crash, and the reward of long years of toil and labour is suddenly swept away; and the

temptation comes to him to rebel against the blow that seems to be so undeserved. 'What have I done to deserve this? I have been honest and hard-working; I have defrauded no man: why should this trouble have been allowed to fall upon me?' Ah! but was it treasure real and true that he had been laying up? If God's voice be listened to, the gentle rebuke, and the tender drawing of the rebuke might be heard: 'Lay up for thyself treasure in Heaven.'

And lastly, as years go on, and when the time comes that the infirmities of age begin to be felt, when the limbs begin to totter, and the memory to fail somewhat, and the intellect is no longer quite so clear and bright as it was, then there comes another great trial, another great temptation to rebel against God's discipline of life. There are few trials, probably, more painful to the strong man of vigorous intellect, or of energetic life, than that of the sense of this creeping on of infirmity. The temptation under its pressure to fretfulness and irritability must be very terrible. May God give us grace, if the time should come when this temptation assails us, to say, 'I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me in this trial,' and may it be granted to us, in His mercy, to hear in it His loving words of welcome calling us home: 'Come unto Me all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

Of this we may be sure—that the joys of life will be made more bright, and the sorrows of life will be lightened, if in them all we hold fast to this resolution: 'I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.'

II.

THE THOUGHTFUL MIND.

‘I will meditate also of all Thy work.’--PSALM lxxvii. 12.

IN the spiritual life there must not only be the attentive ear, but there must also be the thoughtful mind. It is not enough to be swift to hear, but we must also meditate upon what we hear. Read, mark, learn, inwardly digest, and then put into practice what we have heard, learned, and understood.

So next, after the resolution, ‘I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me,’ naturally follows the resolution, ‘I will meditate also of all Thy work ;’ after listening to God’s message it is necessary that we should think about it.

So we come now to the question of the practice of meditation as being one of the essential exercises of the spiritual life.

Now meditation is a form of devotion, which, there is reason to fear, is far too much neglected in the present day. The whole spirit of the age in which we live would seem to militate against it. There is a very sad lack of repose in life to-day. The necessities of modern life have rendered competition so keen, locomotion so easy, and so frequent, and life altogether so busy, and so restless, in its activities, that men of all classes

in every station of life seem to have but little time for quiet thought ; whether life, lived at the high pressure of the times, is any happier, or any better, than it was in the old days of slower movement, of less keen competition, and of less excitement, may be a matter for argument ; but this much is certain, that the quiet repose brought about by meditation, and which is elbowed out by the restless activities of the day, is rendered all the more necessary by those very activities. For the habit of meditation is that very thing which, above all others, will tend to produce the strength of character, the calm self-possession, and prompt, yet firm and deliberate, action, which are of such immense value, and which form so great a power in the busy life.

Now, first of all, we will try to explain what it is that we understand by meditation.

It is not, what sometimes it is supposed to be, mere idle, inactive dreaming. It is one of the most active exercises of the soul, and lays the foundation of all well-directed and energetic life.

What is meditation ? It is a part, and an indispensable part of prayer.

Now, prayer has been called the soul's converse with God, and taking this general definition of prayer, we shall by it at once see what is meant by meditation.

Converse, or conversation, with our friend has two distinct yet closely connected parts. In the conversation which I have with my friend there are these two parts : first there is the part in which I speak to him, and next there is the part in which I listen to what he says to me, think about it, and then reply to him. And both these parts are necessary to it ; if either be wanting, it cannot be called conversation.

So it is with prayer, or the soul's converse with God. There is that part of prayer in which I speak to God, lifting up my heart and soul to Him and laying my needs before Him ; and there is also that part of my converse with God in which I listen to what He says to me, either in His written Word, or as He speaks through the voice of His Church, or through the voice of conscience, or in the beauty and marvels of nature, or through the teaching of science, or in all that strange discipline of life by which, through joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain, prosperity or adversity, He is teaching me, and guiding me, and leading me to Himself ; and then, having hearkened to what he says concerning me, I answer Him, either by making some firm resolution, or by some definite and immediate action.

These two parts are necessary to true prayer ; and they are sometimes spoken of as vocal prayer, and mental prayer ; or again as prayer and meditation.

We may then define meditation, for our purpose here, as being that part of the soul's converse with God in which we listen to what He says, try to understand it, and then answer Him by some exercise of the will.

‘ I will meditate also of all thy work.’

Here we have, then, the thoughtful mind exercised in the spiritual life.

Now, from what we have said, it will be seen that three great powers of our nature are brought into play in this spiritual exercise of meditation, viz. the memory, the understanding, and the will.

By the memory, we recall something that God has said or done ; something we heard when we carried out our resolution as to the attentive ear and said, ‘ I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me’ ;

something He has said to us in one or other of the many ways in which He speaks to us ; or we recall some event recorded in Holy Scripture, some scene in our Lord's life, or in the lives of His saints, or some truth which we have been taught as to one or other of the mysteries of religion.

And having done this, we then go on to exercise the understanding in applying to ourselves what we have recalled by the memory ; trying to see its bearing upon our own personal life, and to ascertain what God's will, in it, is for us.

And then, by the will moving the affections, we proceed to make some resolution for the future, some resolution which shall form the basis of action.

So meditation, properly understood, is by no means an idle, dreamy, inactive, contemplative occupation, interfering with, or hindering, the activities of life ; but, on the contrary, it is just that very thing which forms the firmest basis of true, prudent, and vigorous action, and which tends to fill life with definite meaning, manly purpose, and enthusiastic zeal.

Now, although this is all very simple, and probably well-known by us all, yet we fear, as we have already said, that this habit of meditation is much neglected. And it will probably be useful if we go on to illustrate the practice by an example.

There is an Old Testament story, one which we have all of us known from childhood probably, that sets before us in the clearest manner this idea of true meditation of which we have been speaking. It is the story of Isaac.

Abraham was now in his old age, Sarah had lately died and had been laid to rest in the cave of Machpelah.

Isaac, who, unlike his father Abraham, or afterwards his son Jacob, had never travelled far from home, was living with his father at Mamre. Abraham had sent his faithful servant to choose a wife for Isaac from among his kindred at Padan-aram. And as they waited for the servant's return, this incident is recorded: 'Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide; and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming.'

It is an exceedingly beautiful story, very simply and briefly told; but the picture which it sets before us is remarkably vivid, and almost every word of the story touches some one point or other in the question of meditation.

We notice in it first that 'Isaac went out.' There was purpose here; it is not that he happened to be out in the field, and, having nothing else to do, he fell to thinking, but 'he went out' for a purpose, and the purpose is stated, 'to meditate.' He was acting in the spirit of the resolution of the Psalmist: 'I will meditate.' We may take it then that meditation was with him a habit regularly practised. Ah! and this is what there must be in the spiritual life—a habit of meditation, a systematic habit of meditation. There are certain crises in our lives when some event or other is forced in upon us, and we are compelled to meditate; but if we wait for that to happen, meditation will be but very imperfectly done. At such times, what we most need is to be able to think quickly, rightly, and straight, to draw sound conclusions, and to form resolutions at once; and it is only the habit of meditation that will prepare, train, and enable, us to do that. His conclusions will always be the truest and wisest, as well as the most quickly

arrived at, who cultivates this habit of meditation. In the first place then, we notice that this habit of meditation seems to have been in the case of Isaac a systematic habit. 'He went out into the field to meditate.'

The place, also, for his meditation seems to have been chosen. He went out for the purpose of meditating, and he carried out that purpose 'in the field.' How exceedingly well suited for the purpose was that field ! It was the quiet place near to his home, where removed from all interruption and distraction, he could be alone with God. It was, also, the place where his work lay, the scene of his daily toil and labour. Further, it was the place where the evidences of God's love and power were manifest. The place which spake to him of God's mercies in the past, and of His blessings in the present, and not only so, but also of His promises for the future; for this land was the promised inheritance of Abraham and his seed after him. The field, with its blue vault of heaven, or its star-lit sky, spake to him, also, of Heaven itself. It was here that he went out to meditate.

Then, too, we can hardly fail to notice the time which he chose for his meditation. We are told that it was 'at the eventide;' it was the time of prayer and communion with God—the eventide, when the work of the day was over, and when the rest that night brings was drawing near. It was 'at the eventide' when the shadows were lengthening out, and the sun was setting, and the evening stars were just beginning to shine out, and the gloom of the approaching darkness was creeping over the scene; the eventide, when the flocks and the herds were coming home to the fold and to the shelter.

We are not, indeed, told what it was that, on this particular occasion, formed the subject of his meditation.

We have, however, but to think, for a moment, of the history of his life to see that there were many subjects upon which he must often have dwelt.

In one sense Isaac's life had been very uneventful, as we have already said it was unlike that of Abraham, who had been a great traveller, and unlike that of his son Jacob in later years, who also saw many countries and divers people. His life had been, for the most part, spent in his father's tent and with his father's flocks and herds. And yet in another sense his life had been full of the most thrilling incident. It was a life of the most marvellous interest. Ah ! and is not that the case with us all ? No matter how quiet, and monotonous, our life may seem to be at first sight, no matter how devoid of romantic adventure, no matter how much it may have been spent in quiet seclusion away from the great, busy, outside world—when we come really to look into it and to examine it, it is seen to be full of the most thrilling incident, overflowing with the most momentous and startling interests. Ah ! what a wonderful thing is the story of the Life of a Soul.

But to go back to the story of Isaac's life. Let us try to see some few of the events in it which must often have challenged his meditation.

In the first place he had been miraculously born. He had been sent into the world for some special purpose, with a mission to fulfil ; he had, no doubt, heard of God's promise to his father Abraham, ' In thee and in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed,' and he had heard of the further promise, ' In Isaac shall thy seed be called.' Here, then, was matter for his meditation. What was the mystery of his birth ? Why had he been sent into the world ? What was the purpose

of his life? What was the mission that God had given him? How could he fulfil it?

Then, again, not only had he been miraculously born and sent into the world, but the life so given to him had been miraculously preserved. Looking back some fifteen years, he remembers a scene which must have been so stamped upon his memory that it could never be forgotten. He remembers that strange journey to Mount Moriah, taken suddenly one morning early. He remembers the deliberate, yet rapid, preparations for the journey; he recalls how they clave the wood for the burnt-offering; he remembers the ass being saddled, and the two young men called, and then the setting out silently, and mysteriously, in the grey light of the early dawn. He recalls the pained look of fixed purpose in his father's face. Then he remembers how, on the third day, the halt was made at the foot of Mount Moriah; and how the purpose of the journey was partly unfolded to him as his father, taking the wood and laying it on him, said to the young men, 'Abide here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.' He remembers how, as he bearing the wood and his father with the fire and the knife in his hand toiled up the hillside together, he broke the painful silence and said, 'My father,' and the saddened voice in which the answer was spoken, 'Here am I, my son.' And then, how in answer to his question, 'Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?' there was the but half-stifled sob of agony in his father's voice as he said, 'My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering.' There is stamped upon his memory all the following scene, as they silently reached the top of the hill, the place of God's appointment; and

there the altar was built, and the wood laid in order upon it. He remembers how, at last realising the meaning of it all, he held out his hands, in simple obedience to his father, to be bound, a willing sacrifice. He can even now see his father, with knife uplifted, looking up with agonised gaze to heaven, waiting for the will of God to be finally spoken ; and he can even yet hear the voice from Heaven accepting the sacrifice and *staying* the father's hand. And then he remembers the ram being offered in his stead ; and the sobered, solemn, and thankful joy of the return to Beersheba, in the renewed blessing that rested on obedience. A marvellous scene it was, one never to be obliterated from his mind ; though neither his father nor he then knew the full meaning, either, of all that was typified by that sacrifice, or all the depth of meaning that was contained in the name then given to the spot, Jehovah-Jireh, 'the Lord will provide.' Neither of them realised that there, upon that spot, the type should be fulfilled in the sacrifice of the Incarnate Son of God, and the satisfaction made for the sins of the whole world. Here, again, was subject for meditation. Why had his life been thus preserved ? What was he doing with this preserved life ? How was he fulfilling the purpose of God ? There was, then, not merely the mystery of creation, but that of preservation also ; that is to say the whole mystery of life.

But there was yet more than this. His mother, Sarah, had lately died. The cave of Machpelah, where she lay buried, spake to him of the mystery of death, which was as yet so dark. The mystery of death, then, as well as that of life, claimed his attention. God was speaking to him through it. What did it all mean ? His life had been for a time preserved, it is true ; but

still the day would come when he must die. How should he meet death when it should come?

And further yet, as the past and the present suggested matter for meditation, so did the future too. He was comparatively still a young man, some forty years of age. Much of life was yet before him. Eliezer of Damascus, Abraham's steward, had gone to choose a wife for him. He was expecting their return. New hopes and joys, new duties and responsibilities, were opening out in the future before him. How should he receive them and fulfil them? What was God's will for him as to the future? Here, again, was another vast field for meditation. There was, indeed, no lack of matter for him to dwell upon. Life and death, the past, the present, and the future, all claimed his attention.

We go on next to notice in the story that Isaac 'lifted up his eyes and saw.' The man who makes a practice of meditation will always be the quickest to see. Many people go through life without seeing, 'they have eyes and see not.' Looking is not always seeing. Two persons will take a walk together in the field; the one who thinks most, and meditates often on the beauties of nature, will see many things that the other will overlook altogether. There are few greater helps to seeing, either in the world of nature or of grace, than the habit of meditation.

'Isaac lifted up his eyes and saw.' And what did he see? 'Behold, the camels were coming.' It was no unusual sight, probably, to see a string of camels passing across the plain, standing out in the landscape dark, and dun, against the soft evening sky. But he at once recognised what they meant for him. The camels were coming; Eliezer was returning, bringing Rebekah, the

wife chosen for him after prayer. The camels meant for him, then, new joys and new hopes, new duties and fresh responsibilities, intermingled with new troubles and sorrows ; all these came to him as the camels brought him their precious burden.

He went to meet them ; Rebekah in her gentle modesty lighted down from off the camel. Isaac received her lovingly and bravely, and took her to Sarah's tent, left desolate by his mother's death, and was comforted.

The story sets before us a very beautiful picture of meditation, which we shall do well to copy.

First let us cultivate a habit of meditation. The place for meditation is always to be found. The home, or the place where our work lies. The house of God which speaks to us of His goodness in the past, His blessings in the present, and His promises to us and to our children as to the future. The place which, like the field with its star-lit sky, speaks to us of Heaven itself, the dwelling-place of God and the home of His saints.

The time, too, for meditation, each eventide, when the work of the day is over, and the night is drawing nigh ; and thus the habit contracted as life goes on, remaining with us to the eventide of life, when the work of life is drawing to a close, and we can look back upon it ; when the shadows are lengthening out, and the night of death is drawing near, and the star of hope begins to shine out, lighting up the darkness of that night that must precede the breaking of the everlasting day : the eventide of life, when the sheep of God's pasture are going home to the fold.

May God in His mercy grant us all a quiet time for meditation in the evening time of life !

Then we go on to consider how just those same

things which may have formed the subject of Isaac's meditation present themselves also to us.

First there is the great mystery of our creation ; we have all been sent into the world with a mission to fulfil, and with a definite work to do, just as really and truly as Isaac was. We do not come into existence at haphazard, just to eat and drink and sleep ; just to buy and sell and get gain ; just to please ourselves, to do as we choose, and to enjoy life so long and as best we may, and then to die when our time comes. Ah, no ! there is a purpose in the life of each ; a definite, serious purpose, which is to be worked out ; we have each a definite and distinct place to fill in God's plan, which no other soul can fill. We may answer to our calling, we may fulfil our mission, or not ; but the purpose is there. What is it ? How are we fulfilling the purpose for which we were sent into the world ? Here is matter for constant meditation. Ah ! well for us if we form a habit of meditating upon it. Let the memory recall the fact that we are sent into the world for a purpose ; let the understanding be exercised in trying to see what that purpose is ; and let the will determine upon some energetic action.

But there is not only the mystery of creation, but there is also the mystery of preservation. We have all been preserved, from day to day, by the good providence of God as truly as Isaac was ; though we may not have seen the uplifted knife ready to strike nor heard the voice from heaven staying the hand.

What are we doing with this preserved life ? A preserved life should always be a dedicated life. Is it so with us ?

And once again, not only does life given and pre-

served supply us with subject for meditation, but surely death does so too. Who is there into whose home death has not come, as it came into the home of Isaac? If the grave of his mother called for Isaac's meditation, how much more do the graves of our dear ones call for ours! How much brighter and how much more full of meaning are they for us than was the Cave of Machpelah for him! Of how much more hope do they speak! Not closed in the darkness of uncertainty as to the great future, as was the Cave of Machpelah to Isaac, but lit up for us by all the light shed over the whole question of death by the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. He has broken the bonds of death by passing through it. Our dear ones are laid in the grave in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection in Him; we, also, must be laid there in due season. Oh, may it be in the same hope of the same glorious resurrection to eternal life! Good were it for us if we meditated more than we do on this subject of death.

But we must not forget that to each of us, young and old, there remains something of life, here on earth, in the future. It may be but a very short time, it cannot be for any of us very long; but its very shortness enhances its importance. However short or however long in God's wisdom and goodness it may be, every moment of it is precious, inasmuch as every moment affords the opportunity of serving Him, and in some way or other of fulfilling our mission. Day by day, and hour by hour, new duties, and new responsibilities, open out before us, and meditation is one of the means of bracing us up for their due discharge.

Meditation should lead to our lifting up our eyes and seeing. The practice of meditation will enable us

to see more clearly, and more distinctly, what is God's will for us in life ; and as each day brings to us, as the 'camels coming' across the field brought to Isaac, the precious burden of revived hopes, of new calls to work, of new responsibilities to bear, of new duties to fulfil, and of new sorrows to endure, we shall have renewed strength to go to meet them, to accept them lovingly and gratefully ; revived fortitude wherewith to bear life's sorrows, and fresh energy with which to discharge its obligations, and our life, like Isaac's tent, left desolate through dead hopes and lapsed opportunities, will once more be filled with definite meaning, manly purpose, and enthusiastic zeal.

Never let us think of meditation as being an idle, dreamy, apathetic occupation. Never let us suppose that it interferes with or hinders the activities of life. There is no habit which tends more to revive the memory, clear the understanding, and nerve the will ; or indeed to strengthen the whole character ; it produces calm self-possession ; it replaces impulsive and spasmodic action by firm and deliberate effort, and tends to bring about in the person who practises it just that which is so much needed in the busy life.

We have tried to illustrate the general question of meditation by a general example. We have said that it should be cultivated as a regular and fixed habit ; and now to make the matter still more practical, we would venture to suggest one method of selecting subjects for daily meditation and a way of practising it. The Psalms have ever furnished the saints with subjects for meditation in every age, and what we would suggest is this. Take one verse of the Psalms for the day as the subject for meditation during the day. Nothing is

easier than to do this. To read before our morning devotions one verse, beginning with the first verse for the day, the next month taking the second verse, and so on. Keeping that verse in mind during the day, we shall find ourselves perfectly amazed to see the number of side-lights which will be thrown upon its meaning, as the events of the day succeed each other ; how continually the understanding of that verse will develop itself ; and how resolutions respecting it will suggest themselves. No one, unless he has tried it, can imagine how helpful to the spiritual life such a practice is, or how interesting and almost fascinating after a time it becomes. Certainly it would largely help us to carry out our resolution, 'I will meditate also of all Thy work.'

III.

THE THANKFUL HEART

‘I will always give thanks unto Thee for that Thou hast done.’—
PSALM lii. 10 (Prayer Book version).

OUR daily life, with all its dull monotony, or with all its stirring activities, as the case may be, is to be lived in union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, and the general aim of that life, viz., ‘In all things to do the will of God, and to finish His work,’ must be supported by resolutions calmly made and steadfastly adhered to and carried out.

The first of these resolutions will be to have an attentive ear. To listen, and to listen in order to obey, to every message that God may send us, in whatever way He may see fit to send it: ‘I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.’ And this resolution will give a true direction to the activities of our life; but it will do this only in so far as it is followed up by the next resolution, viz., that of bringing the thoughtful mind to bear upon the message. Meditation is necessary if we are to understand what we hear, and to be in a position to apply it.

Our daily life will have its true direction pointed out by God’s message, but it will be filled with glorious

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meaning, with manly purpose, and with enthusiastic zeal by the practice of meditation.

And so the first resolution, to have an attentive ear, 'I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me,' must be followed up by the resolution to bring the thoughtful mind to bear upon the message, 'I will meditate also of all Thy work,' and that in its turn will be followed by the resolution of the thankful heart, 'I will always give thanks unto Thee for that Thou hast done ;' for meditation will not only point out the duties of the future and revive zeal for their performance, but it will also reveal the mercies of the past, and kindle gratitude for them ; and the one result of meditation will thus re-act upon the other, for there are few greater incentives to future energy than the thankful remembrance of past mercies.

In the spiritual life, then, there will be not only the attentive ear and the thoughtful mind, but there will also be the thankful heart. Deep and abiding gratitude will be one of the characteristic features of the spiritual life, filling it with joy and gladness, and making it bright, earnest and vigorous.

'I will always give thanks unto Thee for that Thou hast done.'

Now, in the first place, we have here a very valuable test, whereby we may judge of the character of our own spiritual life, and see whether it is, what it should be, healthy and vigorous. Is it really pervaded by a spirit of gratitude ? That it ought to be is certain ; but is it ? Alas ! as we carefully examine into our lives, it is to be feared that we shall, for the most part, have to acknowledge that our gratitude for all God's mercies is very poor, cold, narrow and feeble. At times, indeed, we

may for the moment be sensible of a heart full of thankfulness for some mercy vouchsafed, or for some startling danger averted, for some sorrow or fear removed, or for some joy given ; but very often it is only a passing sentiment, and in no sense an abiding characteristic of the life ; and when the danger is past, when the sorrow has been removed, or when the blessing is secured ; then all is taken, so to speak, for granted, the feeling of gratitude to God too often passes away, and we fall back again into a mere listless and unthankful acceptance of life ; or into an unwilling submission to its sorrows ; and as the result brightness very much passes out of our lives.

Now, the resolution expressed by the Psalmist, 'I will always give thanks for that Thou hast done,' implies something very different from this.

Here is not a mere passing sentiment of gratitude. Here is an abiding sense of thankfulness towards God for all the past, as well as for the present ; an abiding principle filling life with brightness, inspiring happy confidence, kindling enthusiasm, and acting as one of the most powerful of all incentives to sustained faithfulness. 'I will always give thanks'—it is not the utterance of a merely transient sentiment, but it is the continued expression both in word and in deed of a deep and abiding gratitude.

There is hardly anything more calculated to make life strong and bright, there is no habit which tends more distinctly, or more effectually, to remove the gloom of the past, to soften the shadows of the present, or to dispel fears as to the future, than this habit of thanksgiving.

And now we will devote our attention for a few moments to the consideration of what things are to form the subject of our thanksgiving. The Psalmist

says, 'I will always give thanks unto thee for that Thou hast done.' St. Paul says, 'Giving thanks always for all things,' and 'In everything give thanks.'

Now, in the first place, we notice that there are certain things which, we all at once admit, do unquestionably call for gratitude, and for the expression of that gratitude. Whether we always respond to that call, whether we are as grateful as we should be, or express our gratitude as warmly as we ought to do, is another matter. But we all readily admit that we are bound to thank God for 'our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life.' There is no difficulty here at all.

Again, no one who knows himself to be a sinner, and who believes in the Sacrifice offered for the sins of the whole world by the Incarnate Son of God, will for a moment deny that we are bound to thank God above all 'for His inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Every member of the Church of Christ, admitted to all the privileges of, and assisted by all the help given through, the Blessed Sacraments, will at once admit it to be his duty to thank God for 'the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.'

And one would think that it were impossible that anyone who really believes that God created and preserves him, redeemed him and sanctifies him, for the very purpose that he may attain to the fruition of that 'hope of glory' which is held out to him, should remain unthankful, or that he should not both by word and by deed give thanks to God for these unspeakable blessings.

There is no difficulty here at any rate, as to the claim God has on our gratitude, nor is there any excuse

for our neglecting to give Him the thanks due to Him.

But there are other things as to which the claim is not at first sight so readily recognised, and to give thanks for which requires the training of a habit of thankfulness.

St. Paul, as we have already noticed, says, 'Giving thanks always for all things.' That is, not only for those things of which we have just been speaking, but, for many other things that come to us in life, 'for all things.' For all the sorrows of life as well as for all its joys, for adversity as well as for prosperity, for sickness as well as for health.

Now here we are, beyond all question, met by a difficulty, and if we are honest in the matter we shall acknowledge the difficulty and face it. It seems to us that we ought to ask and to answer this question. Can I do this? Is it possible for me? For it were the most hateful hypocrisy to profess to thank God with the lips for what in my heart I resent as being not a blessing but an evil. Can I then thank God for 'all things'? Is it possible for me to thank Him, as He ought to be thanked, with a full, heartfelt gratitude, for all these hard and painful things which so materially disturb, and interfere with, my present enjoyment of life? Is it possible for me to thank God honestly and earnestly for sorrow, for adversity, for sickness, for sorrow of heart, for disappointed hope, for blighted affections? Is it possible in the case of still greater trials, trials of faith and of other virtues, can I do as St. James bids us do when speaking of such trials, he says, 'Count it all joy when ye fall in divers temptations'?

Our answer to all such questions is this: 'Yes, it is

possible ; it may be difficult, and no doubt the difficulty is often very great, indeed ; but it is possible.' And it is just this habit of thanksgiving which we ought to cultivate in all things, thus carrying out the resolution of the thankful heart, 'I will always give thanks unto Thee for that Thou hast done,' which will enable us to see in these things that which calls for gratitude.

That remarkable man, whoever he may have been, who wrote the 119th Psalm, the value of which as a guide to life can hardly be over-estimated, found himself able to do this—to thank God for the troubles he endured.

We know in one way very little about him. We do not know his name, or tribe or calling, rank or station, and yet from the Psalm itself we learn a great deal about him, especially about his character.

He had not always been what he was when he wrote the Psalm. He had been a great sinner and had gone wrong. He had forsaken God and had taken his own way. He had sat among princes and had given himself up to the world. But trouble had fallen upon him, and now he was small and of no reputation, now the world spake against him. Now in his old age he has given himself heart and soul to do God's will. There are only two verses in the whole Psalm wherein the law of God under some title or other is not spoken of, and even in these two verses it is referred to. In God's law he now delights and in God's ways he finds peace. He had arrived at that point when he could thank God with an unfeigned heart for the troubles that had been sent him. He could say with all thankfulness, 'It is good for me that I have been in trouble.'

That is not the ordinary view which men take of trouble, but it is the true view to take.

No one really striving to live to God, looking back upon his past life, will fail to see the value of trial in the formation of character, the use of trouble in the training of the soul, or the immense importance of the place which sorrow, trouble, and suffering hold in the economy of grace.

When once that is realised, then the sorrows of life and all its troubles and cares become part of the subject matter of thanksgiving.

The mystery of suffering will always be a difficulty so long as suffering is held to be an evil to be avoided, or looked upon as something which is merely punitive in its character. We do not deny that suffering is an evil thing, in that it has been caused by sin ; nor do we for a moment say that suffering is not punitive in its character ; but it is not merely that, it is something far higher than that. It is one of the conditions of the development of the spiritual life. And the sufferings which we are called upon to endure should never be separated in thought from the sufferings which our blessed Lord endured for us. He, we are told, in His perfect humanity, 'learned obedience by the things which He suffered.' He was 'made perfect through suffering.'

We must remember that 'our life must be lived in union with Him.' That is the spiritual life. We are members of Him. His sufferings now, it is true, are ended, but His life on earth was a life of suffering. United with Him we must suffer ; suffering is part of the blessedness of that union. We are to rejoice, inasmuch as we are 'partakers of Christ's sufferings.' 'The sufferings of Christ' are to 'abound in us.' 'If we suffer we shall also reign with Him.'

Suffering, then, is a condition of the development of

the spiritual life. When that truth is grasped then it becomes possible to thank God for sufferings and to say with the Psalmist, 'It is good for me that I have been in trouble.' 'Before I was troubled I went wrong, but now have I kept Thy word,' 'I will always give thanks unto Thee for that Thou hast done.'

There is yet one more point in this question of the habit of thanksgiving upon which we must say a few words, viz., the power for good which it exercises over others. The spiritual life is above all things unselfish, it will ever have the good of others in view. To cultivate a habit of thanksgiving is not only a part of our duty to God, but it also enters into the question of our duty to our neighbour. If thanksgiving be a feature of our life, it will infallibly brighten the home, it will encourage others, it will strengthen their faith, and help to sustain their zeal. A bright, thankful life is an immense power in teaching practical religion.

Let us here take an example of national thanksgiving, and draw from it a lesson of personal life.

Let us look for a moment at the forty-eighth Psalm. It is the expression of the nation's gratitude for God's mercy, in the preservation of Jerusalem in the time of some great danger ; and if not specially referring thereto, it is at least remarkably applicable to the deliverance of the city from the army of Sennacherib :

'Walk about Sion, and go round about her : and tell the towers thereof. Mark well her bulwarks, set up her houses : that ye may tell them that come after. For this God is our God for ever and ever : He shall be our guide unto death.'

Jerusalem had been shut up by the invading hosts of Assyria. The King of Assyria had sent his message to

Hezekiah, blaspheming God, misrepresenting the king, threatening destruction to the city, and tempting the people from their allegiance. The danger appeared to be overwhelming ; there seemed to be no hope of relief, no way of escape.

But the king prayed, and the people were obedient, all stood firm and the temptation was resisted. God's promise of protection was sent. How it was to be fulfilled they knew not ; but it was believed, and then there followed the great deliverance. In the night that vast advancing army was destroyed. The city was safe. Not an arrow had been shot there. The bulwarks were untouched, the Temple uninjured.

The whole nation turned to God in gratitude, recalled the mercies of the past, and recorded its resolution to cling to God. 'Walk about Sion, and go round about her ; and tell the towers thereof. Mark well her bulwarks, set up her houses : that ye may tell them that come after. For this God is our God for ever and ever : He shall be our guide unto death.'

The gratitude of the nation was not to be a mere passing sentiment, but an abiding thankfulness influencing the after life ; it was to be known of all, and the knowledge of it was to be handed on to others that should come after, that they too might thank God for that He had done, and themselves be stirred up to cling to Him who is mighty to save.

Now here is our personal lesson. Each one of us is the temple of the living God. Each one of us has over and over again been attacked by the enemies of God, the enemies of the soul, the devil, the world, and the flesh. They have hemmed us in on all sides. There has been the message of blasphemy, the messenger

misrepresenting us and our motives ; there has been the message threatening our destruction, and tempting us to give up our allegiance to God.

‘ Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me, and then eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig-tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern : until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive and of honey, that ye may live, and not die : and hearken not unto Hezekiah, when he persuadeth you, saying, the Lord will deliver us.’

Ah, yes ! the temptation has come to us again and again, almost in the very words of Rabshakeh, from the great enemies of our souls.

And in those times of difficulty, trial, and fear, when there seemed to be no way of escape, we, like Hezekiah, laid our troubles before God, poured out our soul to Him, and prayed for help. And the help was promised, and though we knew not how it would be given, yet, believing the promise, we stood firm. The temptation was resisted, to it we answered not a word, and presently the great deliverance came, and our heart was glad. We had come safely out of the trial. God’s protection had shielded us, and by His grace the temple of God, our soul, had remained uninjured. The enemy was driven away, and the citadel was safe.

If that has, in any sense, been our history, and surely, in a greater or less degree, it has been our history over and over again during life, has it not ? then let us thank God for His mercy. But we must not let our thankfulness be a mere transient feeling, it must characterise our whole life. We must let others see it and know it—

our children, our friends, all with whom we are brought into contact.

And then the result will be, first, the strengthening of our own spiritual life, and the brightening of all our surroundings. We ourselves shall find in the thankful remembrance of past mercy a most powerful incentive to future faithfulness. The whole character of life will be changed for us by the habit of thanksgiving. Mercies and blessings will be seen on every side ; brave efforts will take the place of gloomy regrets ; bright hopes will banish sad forebodings. There will be happy confidence instead of fear and despondency ; trust in God, and in His grace, will promote more energetic strivings to obtain it and more diligent endeavours in its use ; and there will be that determination to cling to God which is contained in the words, ' This God is our God for ever and ever : He shall be our guide unto death.'

And then, in the next place, not only will our own life grow brighter and stronger, but our habit of thanksgiving will be also a source of strength to those near and dear to us, and to all whom we influence. It will help to raise the tone of life all round about us. It will help to bring, and to keep, the thought of God as the supreme and ruling power in the world before others.

The bright life of thankfulness ; the life that is the ' giving thanks always for all things ;' the life that is the practical carrying out of this resolution, ' I will always give thanks unto Thee for that Thou hast done,' is one of the most powerful means of teaching practical religion. It is the best way of telling God's mercies to them that come after, that they too may say, ' This God is our God for ever and ever, He shall be our guide unto death.'

IV.

THE HOPEFUL SPIRIT.

‘I will hope in Thy name.’—PSALM lii. 10 (Prayer Book version).

THE resolution to exercise the virtue of hope seems to follow naturally after those of which we have been speaking. In the spiritual life there must be the attentive ear, as it listens for God’s voice; and the soul’s resolution, ‘I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.’ This resolution adhered to will give a true direction to life. Then the thoughtful mind must be brought to bear upon the message that it may be understood. There must be meditation. ‘I will meditate also of all Thy work.’ This habit of meditation will tend to fill life with glorious meaning, manly purpose, and enthusiastic zeal; and it will naturally therefore lead on to the next resolution, viz., that of the thankful heart; for meditation bringing out into bold relief as it does the mercies of the past necessarily kindles gratitude for them. ‘I will always give thanks unto Thee for that Thou hast done.’ And this in its turn will inspire hope as to the future, and so we come to another resolution: ‘I will hope in Thy name.’

So far then these resolutions of the spiritual life are like the links of a chain, each holding on to one and

binding the rest to it—the attentive ear, the thoughtful mind, the thankful heart and the hopeful spirit.

Hope is one of the chief characteristics of the spiritual life.

Now in speaking of hope in connection with our daily life, as it is lived in union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, we understand that hope which is one of three theological virtues; and it is to be defined thus: 'Hope is a virtue infused into our souls by God, whereby we are able to look up to Him, and trust in Him for pardon and salvation, and all things necessary thereto.'

That is the definition of hope as one of the three theological virtues; and here let us say a few words about these three theological virtues before we go on to speak more fully of hope as a characteristic of the spiritual life.

The three theological virtues are faith, hope, and love.

'Faith is a virtue infused into our souls by God, whereby we are able to believe all that He has revealed and His Church teaches.'

'Hope is a virtue infused into our souls by God, whereby we are able to look up to Him, and trust in Him for pardon and salvation, and all things necessary thereto.'

'Love is a virtue infused into our souls by God, whereby we are able to love Him above all things, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.'

Now virtue in the abstract may be said to be good habit. It is the product of the grace of God and of man's will. Grace is the gift of God. Virtue is the exercise of grace. Grace is given, virtue is acquired. The two things must not be confused. They are distinct. To

take an instance of what we mean : there is the grace of humility, and there is the virtue of humility. God, in answer to prayer, will give us the grace of humility ; unless we bring our wills to bear upon the use of that gift it will remain unfruitful, but by using it we may acquire the virtue of humility.

But these three theological virtues have this distinctive character, that they are virtues infused into our souls by God. They are, like all other virtues, to be developed by grace, and by the exercise of our own wills ; but the germs of these virtues or good habits are put into our souls by God. While all other virtues are, so to speak, the adornments of the spiritual life, these three—faith, hope, and charity—are essential to its existence ; without them no other Christian virtues can exist, and therefore they are infused into our souls by God ; though, of course, unless we use His grace in their exercise they will die out.

Now natural hope is placed by God in the souls of all. It has been called the salt of life. It may even be said of hope that it is an essential and necessary element in life ; for when there remains no hope whatever to man, when all hope is finally crushed out, life itself may be said to have ceased.

We have but to consider the matter for a moment to see how marvellously, even in the things of ordinary daily life, men do live in the conscious, or it may often be in the unconscious, exercise of this natural hope. We live far more in, and for, the future than as a rule we are conscious of doing.

It is hope that sustains life from day to day. It helps to relieve the monotony, and enables us to bear the toil and the drudgery of daily labour, which, without

it, would often be unbearable. Eliminate hope altogether from the hearts of men and all work would cease. The ploughman ploughs in hope. The sower sows in hope. But without hope of some kind, the one would cease to plough and the other to sow. And so it is in all the occupations in which men are engaged. Without hope the activities of life would very soon slacken, and finally cease.

Even then, in the things that concern this life, apart from any higher consideration, it is true that hope is 'like an anchor of the soul,' something which sustains and steadies action in the present by fastening upon the future.

Look for a moment at the educational power of hope. How do you deal with your children in their education and their training?

If you are a wise father, you do your best to inspire your lad with hope, do you not? You try to set before him some ideal to be aimed at; you suggest to him some worthy object of ambition in life; you ever strive to show him how his efforts may be most effectual in attaining to that object of ambition; and you then try to inspire him with some definite hope of reaching it—such hope as will best fire his imagination, kindle his enthusiasm, quicken his energies, and sustain his labours. You map out his future for him, and as step by step that plan is worked out in his life, both his hopes, and yours for him, grow. His success at school is followed by his success in later life. The objects of his ambition, or the directions of his energies, may, and no doubt often do, change somewhat in form and character, from time to time, as life goes on. But through it all hope will be the mainstay of his action. Ah, yes! the power that hope

exercises in human life is perfectly marvellous. It is, indeed, a grand incentive to the activities of life.

But now we come to consider what is the meaning of this hope which is implanted, so to speak, in our very nature.

We see hope constantly disappointed, yet ever inspiring fresh courage and moving to new exertions. We see hope cut down, but again springing up ; almost crushed out, but again reviving.

Then, too, we notice another fact in connection with this natural hope, viz., that for the most part the thing hoped for is never reached, it is always receding. The ideal of perfection is never realised, the object of ambition is never attained. Hope is never fully satisfied. For even in the rare cases in which the object hoped for is reached, hope itself is not satisfied, but immediately fastens upon something beyond.

Once more we observe that in human life there is one great bar to the full realisation of hope in this life. The final object of human ambition is never reached here ; for whatever may be the object of that ambition death comes in to stop its pursuit.

The objects of ambition which men propose to themselves, and the ideal of perfection which they hope to reach, will of course vary greatly. In some cases it will be the acquisition of wealth, the attainment of power, the widening out of influence, fame, or the applause of the world ; or it may be something far better than any of these, it may be the development of the intellect, the cultivation of art, the acquisition of knowledge, or the verification of scientific truth ; or it may be something which is higher and better still—the development of some earnest and philanthropic work, the

promoting the happiness of others, the doing some good in one's generation, or the faithful and patient discharge of duty.

But whatever may be adopted as the object of ambition, if nothing else hinder it, death at last always comes in to cut short its pursuit.

Hope by its very nature is eternal, but life is short. Life here is never long enough to secure the realisation of natural hope. All this is, of course, very simple and commonplace ; we have all constantly had it brought before us in our experience of life. But what does all this lead us to? What does it mean?

Can we for a single moment suppose that God—who, being love, created us, the objects of His love, and who loving us necessarily designs our happiness—would have implanted in our nature this natural hope and all the yearning and desire for perfection, which are amongst the very best and highest of our instincts, if they were all to be, in the end, cut off in cruel disappointment? For 'if in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable.'

Ah, no! hope, the power of forming a conception of an ideal of perfection, the steady pursuit of that ideal, the energetic efforts to reach it, have an educational purpose in God's plan. Hope has been implanted in our nature to lead us onwards and upwards towards perfection in God, to lead us on to that future in which there shall be no more bar or hindrance, no more death; that future in which the very highest ideal of perfection shall be realised, reached, and enjoyed. 'Hope is that virtue infused into our souls by God, whereby we are able to look up to Him and trust in Him for pardon and salvation, and all things necessary thereto.'

Christian hope, then, is fixed on God and sustains us in our efforts to reach Him. This is the hope of which the Psalmist speaks in his resolution : ' I will hope in Thy Name.' A hope fixed on God, 'in Thy Name,' and in all that His Name implies and includes. That Name which is above every name, that Name in which alone we can have health and salvation.

This must be one of the resolutions of the spiritual life : ' I will hope in Thy Name.'

That hope which, 'as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil,' and fastens upon Jesus Christ and the things of eternity, and so fills the spiritual life with energy.

Now let us see how this hope leads us on through all the trials and difficulties of life ; helping us in difficulties, supporting us in toil, soothing us in sorrow, sustaining us in temptation, and encouraging us under the pressure of fear.

We are poor, feeble, and weak ; we are weary of toil and labour ; we are sorely tried and tempted ; we are conscious of much sin and infirmity, and of much in the past as well as in the present that is other than we would have it. All this weighs us down ; at times we are inclined to say with the Psalmist, ' My sins have taken such hold upon me that I am not able to look up.' We are in sorrow of heart at the loss of friends ; we are harassed and persecuted ; death and judgment lie before us, and as we think of them our hearts sink within us. And if it were not for the hope that looks up to God, and trusts in him for pardon and salvation, we should give it all up, and sink, crushed beneath all this burden. But hope comes in to help and cheer us.

Let us now again follow in thought the life of our

blessed Lord Jesus Christ, and see how at every point hope fixed on Him, and on His Name, will help us. This is the kind of use we should be constantly making of that wonderful record, following it in thought, bringing ourselves, so to speak, mentally into contact with it.

‘I will hope in His Name.’ ‘His life was given for me’—not merely on the Cross when He died, but all through, every detail of His life was for me. It is with that thought in our minds that we shall most profitably study the story.

See then how hope fastened on Him helps us. We are poor, weak, and feeble : going to Bethlehem, there in the stable, we see poverty and weakness glorified and crowned in the Child Jesus, the Incarnate God. We are weary and worn with work and toil, and going to the carpenter’s shop at Nazareth we see the eternal Son of God, He by whom all things were made, working with His hands and earning His daily bread with ‘chisel, saw and plane.’ And hope revives within us as we are thus reminded of the nobleness and dignity of all toil and labour. We are sorely tried and grievously tempted, almost fainting, almost at the point of giving up, it may be ; but going to the wilderness we see there—ah, wondrous sight !—the Incarnate God tempted yet undefiled ; and hope reminds us that in union with Him, and therefore in His strength, we too may resist and conquer the tempter.

We are in sorrow of heart at the loss of friends, the joy of life seems gone, all is so sad and drear, life is so lonely, that there seems little now to live for ; but, going to Bethany, hope whispers sweet consolation to the soul as we hear the Saviour saying to the mourner whom He loved, ‘Thy brother shall rise again.’

We are overwhelmed by the thought of our sins, bowed down beneath their burden, and passing along the way of sorrows we come to Calvary, and gaze upon that wondrous scene ; and amidst all the noise, tumult, and confusion of sin, we hear that for ever blessed prayer, ' Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do,' and we know that all sin has been atoned for, we know that forgiveness is freely offered to all that will seek it, and hope revives as we cast our burden at the foot of the Cross.

The shadows of death close in around us, but we know too that He has passed that way ; we see the garden of Joseph and the tomb, and Jesus laid therein by the loving care of those for whom He died, and hope bids us say, ' Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ; for Thou art with me ; Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me.' The tomb that could not hold Him speaks to us of the hope of the resurrection to eternal life, and, as in thought we follow the bright track of our ascended Lord, hope speaks of ' the kingdom of Heaven opened to all believers.'

Are we persecuted and perplexed ? Looking up with St. Stephen, hope fastens on the bright vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of power interceding for us, and we know that strength will be given to us that we may win our crown.

And as we think with awe and shrinking of that tremendous scene when we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, still hope has its part to play.

First, hope entering into that within the veil, fastens upon the person of the Judge himself, and beneath the diadem of glory it sees the scars of the crown of thorns.

In the hands that hold the sceptre of power, it sees the print of the nails. In the side, where throbs the pulse of eternal life, it sees the mark of the spear. The love and mercy of the Cross for ever united with the justice and power of the throne.

Hope fastens too on the subject matter of the judgment : ' Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart : and then shall every man have praise of God.' ' The hidden things of darkness.' What a marvellous revelation that will be ! Not merely of sins, of shame, of crime, of dark and horrible deeds ; these will all be revealed—ah, yes ! there is no doubt of that. But there are other things which are surely included in those words, ' the hidden things of darkness '—things known only to God and the soul, some to God only. All the pitfalls avoided, all the dangers escaped, and the secret struggles borne alone. The poor little street arab, with all his terrible disadvantages, still struggling to do right according to his knowledge. The poor ignorant soul fighting its battle with so little light in the midst of all ' the encircling gloom.' All that deep and real penitence ; everything that tells in favour of the poor soul, nothing will then be hidden. ' Are not these things noted in Thy book ? ' Ah ! thank God for it, this thought lifts up the whole question of the great judgment out of the region of abject fear into that of Christian hope—the hope that ' looks up to God and trusts in Him for pardon and salvation and all things necessary thereto.'

But hope fastens not only on the Judge himself, and on the subject matter of the judgment, but it clings fast also to the thought of the personal future of the soul.

‘When He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.’

What more glorious destiny can there be than this? The end of it all: ‘To be like Him.’ The law of assimilation begun here, perfected there, when we shall have reached ‘the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.’ ‘When I wake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.’

Ah! hope will indeed fill the spiritual life with energetic strivings after that which is hoped for. Hope is very patient, very quiet and very strong, but we must remember that hope is also very dependent. Hope expresses itself in prayer. Let us lift up our hearts then, let us have them filled with hope, ever ‘looking up to God and trusting in Him for pardon and salvation, and all things necessary thereto.’ Let us never cease to hope, never cease to pray, never cease to let the hope which God infuses into our souls have its constant exercise, and our spiritual life will grow stronger and stronger, and our path will have ever more and more light shining down upon it, as we daily carry out our resolution, ‘I will hope in Thy Name.’

V.

THE LOYAL WILL.

‘My vows will I perform in the sight of them that fear Him.’—PSALM xxii. 25.

IN the spiritual life there must be not only the attentive ear, the thoughtful mind, the thankful heart, and the hopeful spirit, but there must also be the loyal will.

‘My vows will I perform in the sight of them that fear Him.’

That must be our next resolution. Now, what are these vows which we are faithfully and loyally to fulfil?

They will probably be best considered if we take them in the three classes into which they seem naturally to divide themselves.

First, all the general vows of the Christian life, that is to say, those that are binding upon all Christians alike—the open and public vows which we have all solemnly taken upon ourselves at various periods of our lives.

Secondly, those vows that are binding upon us in our various vocations or states of life—vows which only some of us may have taken and which are, therefore, not binding upon us all.

And, thirdly, all those particular and individual vows which are binding only upon the person who has made them; all those vows differing, perhaps, in almost every

case which, from time to time, we have made ; all those secret resolutions to avoid sin, and to practise virtue, to break off evil habits, and to amend our lives, which we may have individually made in times of trouble, fear, anxiety, or of joy ; all those vows of which the Psalmist elsewhere speaks as those 'which I promised with my lips and spake with my mouth, when I was in trouble.'

Let us now take these classes of vows in order, and think about each of them for a few moments.

First, then, the general vows openly and publicly made by all Christians, and alike binding upon all. What are they ?

In the first place, there are our baptismal vows. Ah ! it is to be feared that there is a very common temptation which comes to us the moment we hear that expression, 'our baptismal vows.' The temptation to fall at once into a listless attitude and to say, 'Oh ! that is a very dry and uninteresting question ; of course we know all about it.' Quite so ; thank God that we do know much about it. But it does not, therefore, follow that the matter is either dry or uninteresting.

Ah ! what deep interest lies in this further question : How have we kept these vows ? 'If ye know these things, happy are ye,' not simply because ye know them, but 'if ye do them.'

The question of how we have kept these baptismal vows is the question of our whole spiritual life ! If we really hold them to be of the first importance, the consideration of them cannot be dry or uninteresting.

We have been reminded of them again and again. We have publicly acknowledged their binding character ; we did so at our Confirmation openly and publicly before

God and before His church in the presence of Christ's chief pastor. But, alas! is it not true that we have forgotten their importance, and often neglected to perform them, not only in secret, but also in the sight of them that fear God?

What are they, these vows and promises made by us or for us at our baptism? First, to renounce all that is bad, all that is opposed to the will of God; the devil and all his evil works; the world and all its deceitful attractions; the flesh and all its sinful lusts.

In a previous section of these considerations we have already spoken more fully of those things which we are bound to renounce, those enemies of the soul which we are pledged to fight against, and therefore we will confine ourselves now to saying this. Let us apply the resolution, 'My vows will I perform in the sight of them that fear Him,' to this part of our baptismal vows. Ah! happy indeed is that home wherein the children are taught, by the example of their parents, to renounce all that is contrary to God's will. Happy indeed is that society in which the members who form it are, each of them, performing this vow in the sight of them that fear God.

But, secondly, the baptismal vow is to believe all that is true, accepting it on authority, 'To believe all the articles of the Christian faith.' Not only some of them, but all of them. How about that vow? How has that been kept in the sight of them that fear God? There is hardly a greater power for good in the world, scarcely a more effectual means of helping others to live the spiritual life, than the power exercised by the life of that man who is openly keeping this vow and living the faith he holds; and the value of the influence which such a life

brings to bear upon society cannot, in the present day, be over-estimated.

The age in which we live is one of very dangerous laxity in its attitude towards the Faith. The general tendency of the age is towards the idea that morals can stand alone, apart from the foundation of definite faith. Young people are constantly taught, either directly or indirectly, by their elders, that it is manly to be independent in this matter, and to believe just what they like ; that to accept truth on authority is a sign of weakness and credulity ; that the intellect should have perfectly free exercise, and that any control of it is an unbearable fetter ; that even the most plainly and distinctly defined dogmas of the Catholic faith are but open questions which anyone is at liberty to argue about, and to discuss freely ; and that there is no distinct duty as to the holding of any of the articles of the Christian faith.

And yet we are all pledged to believe them all, and we have, over and over again, acknowledged the binding character of the pledge we have given ; and we know further that the pledge extends to the living of that faith. We know that it is not merely a question of accepting the dogmas of the Catholic faith, and assenting to them as true in theory ; but that it is a question of having our whole lives, in all their details, ruled and governed by these truths. Let us try more and more to apply this resolution to the question of our faith : ‘ My vows will I perform in the sight of them that fear Him.’

And then in the last place our baptismal vows bind us to do all that is right, ‘ To keep God’s holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of my

life.' We are bound, that is to say, to keep the Ten Commandments in their letter and in their spirit.

These Commandments are in themselves most plain, distinct, and definite. One would imagine that neither their purpose nor their meaning could by any possibility be misunderstood ; and yet, as a matter of fact, the devil, and the world, and the flesh have succeeded in bringing about in men's minds the most extraordinary misconceptions concerning them.

Numbers of people look upon them as things to be learned in childhood ; but they altogether overlook the fact that they are bound to walk in them all the days of their life. Others again often learn to look upon them as so many harsh restrictions placed by the Creator upon the liberty of the creature ; and to think that when God says 'Thou shalt,' or 'Thou shalt not,' He is exercising an arbitrary and tyrannical power.

We do not mean that such men always openly say this, but that is the thought of their hearts ; and they are thereby led to resent what they conceive to be an interference with their liberty.

Now, we have but for a moment to consider the matter in order to see how utterly false is such a view of God's law.

In these Commandments there is no exercise of arbitrary power, but there is the expression of the highest possible love. The true view to take of the Commandments is this, viz., that 'they are God's loving rules for the right use of His gifts to us.' Whenever God bestows a gift, with the gift He, in His mercy, gives also the law for its use, in order that the gift, rightly used, may be a blessing. If the gift be used contrary to that law, it will bring disaster and not blessing.

When He gave the manna to the people in the wilderness, the law for its use was distinctly laid down. The daily gift was to be a blessing so far as there was daily obedience to the rule for its use. There was here no exercise of arbitrary power, there was no tyrannical control, it was all simply the exercise of love and mercy.

Such action appeals at once to our sense of what is right. I give my little lad a pocket-knife, but with it I give him directions for its use, lest by the misuse of it he do himself an injury. Every gift to be of real value must be accompanied by a law for its use.

Now God gives us many gifts, and they are all to be summed up under one or other of the following ten heads :

First, God has given us an instinct of religion. He has implanted in us an instinct of worship ; these are two gifts which the exigencies of our nature demand that we shall use. He has given us the great gift of revelation, a certain knowledge, that is of Himself, and of His dealings with us. He has given us the gift of time. He has given us all that may be included under the head of social relations. He has given us life, that sacred thing which, coming from Him, must be used for Him and accounted for to Him. He has given us an animal nature with all its instincts, passions, and appetites. He has given to each of us, in a greater or less degree, worldly goods. He has given us each a name and a personal reputation, which is to be kept pure and undefiled before God and man. And, lastly, he has given to each one of us all these various gifts and endowments which differ in every case.

All the gifts which God in His love has showered

upon us may be ranged under one or other of these ten heads, and it will at once be seen that the Ten Commandments are God's loving and beneficent rules for the right, and therefore the profitable, use of these gifts.

The first gives the only true direction to the instinct of faith and religion ; the second to that of prayer and worship ; the third protects and develops the gift of revelation ; the fourth regulates the use of time ; the fifth maintains the due order of social life ; the sixth protects life ; the seventh regulates the appetites and passions ; the eighth protects all legitimate possessions ; the ninth protects the name and reputation ; and the tenth secures to each all those various endowments that belong to each.

That is the true view to be taken of these laws of God. They are not harsh restrictions placed by the Creator on the liberty of the creature ; they are in no sense the expression of arbitrary power ; but they are God's merciful rules whereby His gifts are to be used. Each of the Commandments may be summed up in one word, as leading us to Faith, Worship, Reverence, Diligence, Obedience, Kindness, Purity, Honesty, Truthfulness, and Contentment. Think for one moment of how grand, how beautiful, and how happy that life would be which had these ten things as its characteristic features. And that is what God would have us be. That is exactly what our life would be, if we carried out the resolution, 'My vows will I perform in the sight of them that fear Him.'

Besides these general vows, which are alike binding on all Christians, there is the class of vows relating to various vocations and states of life into which we may have entered.

For instance, in the case of very many there is the marriage vow. 'Holy matrimony is an estate instituted of God in the time of man's innocency.' It is a 'holy estate.' Between the man and his wife there is the 'solemn vow and covenant made'—'to love and to cherish' the one the other till death part them. Here is surely a matter which calls for very careful and serious thought on the part of all who have entered into that holy estate.

Think of all the peace and happiness, all the comfort and help—or, on the other hand, all the hindrances to the spiritual life—that may lie wrapped up in the answer to this question : How have these marriage vows been kept ?

We are not now speaking of any of those gross breaches of marriage vows which even the world, lax as it is in such matters, condemns. But of all the strict, delicate and loving performances of them, the fulfilment of them in their full meaning and spirit ; all that careful forethought ; that kindly and courteous consideration ; that loving self-sacrifice ; that gentle forbearance ; that patient long-suffering ; and all those things which make for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other. Well indeed is it for that household in which these vows are performed in the fulness of their spirit as well as in the strictness of their letter.

Now to pass on to the vows which are taken in another estate of life. We do not forget that we of the clergy have our resolution to keep also : ' My vows will I perform in the sight of them that fear Him.'

Would that we realised more constantly, and more deeply, than we do the awfully solemn nature and binding character of our ordination vows !

Of all the vows which are or can be taken, there are

none as to which this resolution is more important than it is to ours. 'My vows will I perform in the sight of them that fear Him.'

Ah ! well indeed is it for that parish where the pastor's personal life and the public discharge of his high duties are a constant, and ever watchful, carrying out of this resolution : 'My vows will I perform in the sight of them that fear Him.'

But there yet remains the question of our individual and personal vows : all those particular vows which each soul has made secretly to God in various times of trial, or of temptation ; in times of sorrow, trouble, or anxiety ; or it may be in times of joy and gratitude for special mercies received, or in moments of religious fervour ; all those resolutions of amendment of life ; all those promises of self-sacrifice, and those vows of self-dedication, which are so frequently and so fervently made on the sick-bed ; or at the open grave of our friends in the hour of sorrow and bereavement ; at the Throne of Grace, at the altar of God ; often in the midst of the anxieties and turmoil of business, more often perhaps in the stillness of the night. Who has not made these vows over and over again ? Ah ! they were easily made in sorrow ; fervently made in repentance ; gratefully made in joy. And we meant them, did we not ? Oh, yes, we intended to keep them. Oh, yes, it was done in all honest intention, and it was rightly done. But how have they been kept ?

Alas, how soon were they forgotten ! How feebly has the resolution made been adhered to and the vow performed !

Has it not been so ; not once or twice, but very often ? Ah, yes ! and as we think of this, it grieves us sorely, as it ought to do. Why has it been so ?

We may, perhaps, here say a word or two of caution as to the general question of the making of resolutions.

Perhaps one of the most common causes of failure in the keeping of resolutions is to be found in the fact that they have not been calmly, wisely, and prudently made. That they have been the result of impulse rather than of calm decision.

All resolutions in the spiritual life should be calmly and deliberately made, and they should be in every case such as are definite, possible, and also of such a nature that the keeping of them can be begun at once.

The resolution should always be definite. For instance, such a resolution as this, 'I resolve to amend my life,' is, of course, good ; but it is only a general resolution, which should first be applied to some one definite thing. 'I will amend my life by giving up this or that habit which leads me wrong,' or, 'by cultivating this or that virtue which I know that I lack ;' or 'by diligently performing this or that duty, which is distasteful to me, and which I am conscious of shrinking from and neglecting ;' then the resolution assumes a definite character. That is a definite resolution.

The resolution should be a possible one. That is to say, it should be a resolution to do something which the circumstances of life will admit of our doing ; and that without involving the neglect of any other duty.

The resolution must be one that can be carried into effect from the very moment of making it. It is of little use to make a resolution to do something some day or other, at some future time ; such a resolution will be very seldom carried out. It should be a resolution which can be carried into effect at once.

‘Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.’

Much failure would be avoided if in making our resolutions we bore in mind that they should satisfy these three conditions : practical, possible, and present.

‘My vows will I perform’—and in no spirit of ostentation, but for the greater glory of God, the Psalmist adds—‘in the sight of them that fear Him.’

Here we have a resolution that fulfils all the conditions we have mentioned. It is practical ; by God’s grace it is possible, that is to say that the circumstances of life do not place such a bar to its performance as to make it impossible ; and it may be begun now, at once, without delay.

The performance of this resolution is a great duty to others.

It were difficult to over-rate the power in helping others that would be exerted if we did always keep it. The effect on the lives of others would be most marked if they, observing us, could say : ‘That man is performing his vows. That man is evidently renouncing all that he knows to be evil. That man is manifestly living the faith he professes. That man is certainly striving to do, in all the details of his life, what he knows to be right.’

Is it not a matter of observation that an immense influence is exercised over the lives of others by the example of such a life—by a life so true, so real, so manifestly single-minded and single-hearted, so evidently the outcome of definite faith and profound conviction, that it at once claims attention and commands respect ?

See the man who is giving liberally as he has been blessed ; look at the life of the man who is devoting

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himself heart and soul to good works at the cost of self-denial, caring for others rather than himself; and who is promoting in every way that he can the glory of God. See the man whose whole life is manifestly the carrying out of this resolution made before God: 'My vows will I perform in the sight of them that fear Him.' And you cannot fail to see that such a man's life is a tremendous power for good, and that it has a great influence in encouraging others to serve God more heartily.

Now these resolutions of which we have been speaking may be still further added to by each of us; and we trust that they will be so added to. But at least let those which we have all made, at some time or other of our lives, be again renewed, calmly and wisely, and let them be faithfully carried out.

Let us keep them ever in mind, and more and more bind ourselves by them, not looking upon them as being the fetters of the slave, but as being what they really are, links in that chain of love that binds us to God Himself.

Once more let us note what these resolutions are.

First, there is the resolution as to the attentive ear: 'I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.' That, if it be carried out, will give a true direction to our spiritual life.

It will be followed by the resolution of the thoughtful mind: 'I will meditate also of all Thy work.' That, if it be practised, will fill life with glorious meaning, manly purpose, and enthusiastic zeal.

To it will succeed the resolution of the thankful heart: 'I will always give thanks unto Thee for that Thou hast done.' That, if adhered to, will light up life with joy and brightness.

Next will come the resolution of the hopeful spirit:

‘I will hope in Thy Name.’ That, if sustained by prayer, will quicken life with energetic effort.

And lastly, there will be the resolution of the loyal will: ‘My vows will I perform in the sight of them that fear Him.’ That will strengthen life with perseverance and continuance in well-doing.

Consider for a moment what a man’s life would be if he really carried out in their fulness these resolutions.

‘I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.’

‘I will meditate also of all Thy work.’

‘I will always give thanks unto Thee for that Thou hast done.’

‘I will hope in Thy Name.’

‘My vows will I perform in the sight of them that fear Him.’

IV.

Responsibilities of the Spiritual Life.

- I. RESPONSIBILITY WITH REGARD TO OURSELVES.
- II. RESPONSIBILITY WITH REGARD TO OTHERS.
- III. RESPONSIBILITY WITH REGARD TO OUR WORK.
- IV. RESPONSIBILITY WITH REGARD TO OUR CALLING.
- V. RESPONSIBILITY WITH REGARD TO GRACE OFFERED
TO US.

I.

*RESPONSIBILITY WITH REGARD
TO OURSELVES.*

‘ The Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou ? ’—GEN. iii. 9.

THE ordinary daily life which we have to live here in the flesh, though not after the flesh, in the world, though not of the world, must be lived in union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, if we would reach the end, and fulfil the purpose, for which we were created, for which we were redeemed, and for which the great work of sanctification is being carried on.

This union with Jesus Christ was first effected at our baptism, when we were made members of Him and were grafted into Him. This union, though it be spiritual and unseen, is none the less a real union, real as that of the members with the body, and as that of the branches with the vine. This union supernaturally effected is supernaturally strengthened, maintained, and developed by grace ; and through this union, happiness, which has been lost by sin, may be regained.

This spiritual life must have as its end, aim and purpose the glory of God, manifested in the happiness of man. To attain to this end we must do the will of God. To be able to do this we must know what the will of God is ;

that knowledge is given to us. We must also have the power to do God's will ; this is offered to us, and the means of obtaining it are given to us. In this life there are all 'the wells of salvation' from which we may obtain daily supplies of grace. This life is a never ceasing battle against the foes of the soul, viz. the devil, the world, and the flesh, against whom we are to fight manfully in the power of grace. In maintaining this battle there must be definite purpose supported by clearly formed resolutions. There must be the attentive ear, the thoughtful mind, the thankful heart, the hopeful spirit and the loyal will.

This life has also its serious and solemn responsibilities. It is of these responsibilities that we have now to speak.

We propose to consider some of the more prominent of these responsibilities which rest upon us, and which will, probably, in some sense be found to include all others.

We shall try to base what we have to say, in these considerations, on the following five questions put by God to man, either directly or through His prophet, viz., the question put by God to Adam, 'Where art thou?' ; that put by Him to Cain, 'Where is Abel thy brother?' ; the question addressed by God to His prophet on Mount Horeb, 'What doest thou here, Elijah?' ; the words spoken by Elijah to Elisha at their first meeting, 'What have I done to thee?' ; and the words spoken at their last interview, 'Ask what I shall do for thee.'

These questions, as it will at once be seen, concern the matter of our responsibility in five of its directions, viz., with regard to ourselves, with regard to others, with regard to our work in life, with regard to our

calling in life, and with regard to the grace which is offered to us by God.

Taking these questions in order, we will now go on to speak of the first of them.

‘The Lord God called unto Adam and said unto him, Where art thou?’ This was the first question put by God to man after the fall.

Hitherto, that bright, peaceful, and happy garden of Eden had been the scene of obedient life, in which, because there was obedience, there was neither room nor necessity for such a question as this, ‘Where art thou?’ Before the fall sinless man, doing the will of his Maker, lived always consciously in the presence of God, seeing as he was seen. There was that open and unimpeded, yet mysterious, communion with the Almighty in which Adam talked face to face with God, in reverence, awe, and wonder, no doubt, but without either fear or shame. Hitherto there had been no separation whatever between the Creator and the creature.

But from the very moment that sin had been committed, all this was changed. Adam by sin had brought about a separation between himself and God. Adam tried to hide himself from God. He shunned the light of God’s presence and sought the darkness because he knew that his deeds were evil. To get away from God, to whom he knew himself to be accountable, was the first evil impulse of his rebellious will ; and his efforts were directed to escaping from all sense of that responsibility with regard to himself which his own act had laid upon him.

The sin which he had committed had indeed opened his eyes. In one sense it is true that the tempter’s promise had been fulfilled. His eyes were opened, yes, but to what had they been opened?

First they were opened to a sense of the greatness, the majesty, and the awfulness of the justice of God against whom he had sinned. There was now brought home to his soul the conviction that God, whom he had hitherto known to be a God of perfect love, must also of necessity be a God of perfect justice.

His eyes were opened, too, to the vast gulf of separation which his sin had effected between himself and God ; he knew that the calm, peaceful, and fearless communion in which he had hitherto lived with God was broken.

His eyes were opened to some of the further consequences of his sin ; the fear of death had fallen upon him ; he had done that which he had been told would bring him death ; he had courted death ; he now knew that he must die, and he had begun to realise something of what death meant—separation from God, who is life itself and the one source of all life.

His eyes were opened, in some degree at least, to the shame and disgrace of his fall ; the knowledge of evil had come to him, grace had departed from him. The consciousness of guilt overwhelmed him ; he saw himself stripped of his garment of original righteousness ; he knew that he was naked ; and thus shame and fear, both hitherto unknown, had darkened his soul.

In his terror and remorse he tried to hide himself, and thus to escape from God, and from all that would remind him of his accountability. The very first effort he made was to repudiate, and to get rid of, the burden of responsibility which was crushing him.

He fled from God ; guilty, he sought for himself the greatest of all punishments that could fall upon him ; in

the folly with which his disobedience had blinded the now opened eyes of his soul, he sought self-imposed banishment from the presence of God, and he sought it amongst the trees of the garden. The trees which the Lord had made would, he vainly thought, hide him from their Maker. Yes, and many, alas! have deceived themselves in the same kind of way ever since, and in their sin have sought the shelter of God's gifts apart from God.

We can conceive of nothing more awful than the future that lay before Adam, had he been left to have his own way: to have gone on ever wandering further and further from the Almighty, ever striving to escape from the light, the darkness ever deepening, fear ever tormenting him, shame ever increasing, horror and remorse ever more and more crushing down his soul into the depth of despair.

And very wonderful is the love of God, as it is shown in the way in which He dealt with this folly on the part of Adam.

The rebellious one must be made to feel and to know that he cannot thus hide himself from God, that he cannot escape from this burden of responsibility for his act, and therefore there comes to him the call from God to appear before Him. The voice of the Almighty was heard calling to him and saying, 'Where art thou?' Not that God the Omniscient One could be in ignorance of where Adam was, but the call was to prove to Adam his folly, to show him that God's voice could reach him, no matter how he fled, and to save him from the awfulness of his self-sought banishment.

Now, in the answer that Adam made, we see that he continued the effort to escape from personal responsi-

bility. Compelled to acknowledge the presence of God, he answered, 'I heard Thy voice in the garden'—ah, yes ! he knew, and he acknowledged that he knew, that God was there—'and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.' He acknowledged that this new thing, fear, had come to him, that 'he was afraid,' and he saw at once that he must account for this fear, and his explanation was this, 'I was naked.' That is, he owned that he was stripped of original righteousness, that garment of innocence in which he had hitherto fearlessly appeared in God's presence. Then he was made to face the fact that all this was but an excuse adopted in order to hide that which was the real cause of his fear ; and therefore there were put to him the further questions : 'Who told thee that thou wast naked ? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat ?'

Once more he tried to escape from his responsibility, and again he urged an excuse: 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat.' Compelled at last to acknowledge his act, he tried to shift the responsibility of it from himself upon the woman, and to make it appear that it rested upon one of the best gifts God had given him. 'The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat.' Thus he indirectly implied that God, the Giver of the gift, was through that gift responsible for what he had done.

Exactly the same thing is to be observed in the case of Eve ; when she was questioned, 'What is this that thou hast done ?' there was the same effort to escape from responsibility : 'The serpent beguiled me and I did eat.'

Throughout the story, from first to last, there is, over and over again repeated, the effort to escape from that burden of personal responsibility which man had, by his sin, brought upon himself.

Sad as the story is, it is one in which we may each one of us, in a greater or less degree, read our own.

Look back for a moment into the past ; recall to mind that evil thing you said, did, or thought, long years ago it may be, but which has not altogether passed out of your memory—that first startling sin of your life, that sin which first really shocked and wounded your tender conscience. And as you recall that time, do you not remember how, after a little while, ‘in the cool of the day,’ when the noise of passion was for the moment stilled, and the sophistry of desire had for the while ceased to deceive, there came crowding into your mind, in quick succession, some such thoughts as these :

First, was there not the thought of the greatness, the majesty, and the awfulness of the justice of God against Whom you had sinned ? You had hitherto thought of Him only, perhaps, as a God of love. But did it not then come home to you, in a way in which you had never felt it before, that being a God of love He must be also a God of justice ?

And you then experienced also, did you not ? some sense of dismay and terror as to that separation between yourself and God which you knew and felt that your sin had created ?

Do you not remember that your heart sank within you as you realised the fact, that the calm and sweet communion with God in which you had hitherto lived was broken, and that there was loss of that inward peace which had hitherto been yours ?

Did you not also, for the moment at least, feel most bitterly the disgrace of your fall, and the shame of it, even though the sin may have been hidden from all, and known only to God and yourself? -

Do you not remember, too, how, at that time, the thought of death, with all its solemnity and terrors, presented itself to you as it had never done before; and how death in its relation to sin stood out clearly before you in a new and startling way?

Then, as these thoughts forced themselves upon you, do you not remember the fact that your first impulse, under the shock your conscience had received, was to get away from all thought of the responsibility which your sin had laid upon you?

And you heard the voice of God, did you not? speaking to you through your conscience, and saying to you, as He said to Adam and Eve of old, 'Where art thou?' 'What is this that thou hast done?'

And then, in answer to these searching questions that came to you through your conscience, and to which you could not close your ears, was there not an effort made on your part to escape from personal responsibility, by casting it upon others, or upon the circumstances that surrounded your life? Were not even the very gifts that God had given you pleaded as excuses for the sin?

Do you know nothing of the excuse which Adam made: 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat'?

Why did God give me desires and appetites if I might not satisfy them? Why did He implant passions in my nature if I might not gratify them? Why did He allow me to be tempted? Why did He permit me

to be tempted if I was to be punished for yielding to the temptation? Why did He place within my reach that which I was not to touch? The circumstances surrounding my life were not of my own making. They compelled me to the act; I could not help myself. Why did He allow these difficulties to surround me?

Ah! what is all this but trying to throw the personal responsibility, with which our own acts have burdened us, upon the gifts with which God has blessed us, and therefore indirectly upon God Himself, the Giver of the gifts.

Explain, or interpret, the excuse as we may, it is still of the same nature as that which Adam made: 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat.'

Ah, yes, alas! we all know something of this kind of excuse, and we may take it that, in a greater or less degree, we have all had some such experience as this.

But not only is there this experience in our own personal lives, the same thing is constantly brought under our notice by what we see and know of the lives of others. All round about us we see people continually trying to escape from the burden of personal responsibility for their acts. We see men, almost daily, wearying themselves, and ruining themselves, in vain efforts to do this; resorting to all kinds of expedients to get rid even of the thought of their accountability; trying, as Adam did, to hide themselves among the trees of the garden.

And there are many trees in the garden of life which are thus resorted to. What are they?

Pleasure is one of them. Do we not know that there are numbers of people, poor souls, who are continually

seeking, in a constant succession of pleasures and amusements, to get away from all thought of personal responsibility? Ah! the miserable seeking after forgetfulness in the distraction of so-called pleasure. How often the sad wistful look, the weary smile, or the heartless laugh, tells of the utter failure of the effort, and of the question still inwardly heard, 'Where art thou?'

Hard work, constant activity and employment, so as to have no time to think! Ah, well! hard work, constant activity and employment, are very good trees in themselves, but they are put to a bad use if they be sought as a refuge from the thought of responsibility.

Other expedients there are to which men resort to escape from responsibility; other trees, which, as they are now seen, cannot be spoken of as trees of the Lord's planting, and yet each having once had a good root which God did plant; the tree has become what it is through man's sin in neglecting to dress and to keep the garden of life. For instance, interest in life, left to grow wild, untrained and undisciplined, has grown into reckless speculation; wholesome enterprise has developed by man's disobedience into gambling; necessary appetite unduly indulged has degenerated into drunkenness; and to these things thousands upon thousands daily fly to hide themselves. 'To drown care,' as is sometimes said, but in reality only to escape from that burden of personal responsibility which they shrink from facing.

We know that this is so. We know that it is one of those facts in human life that are constantly forcing themselves upon our notice, whether we will or no.

Ah, the folly of it! We cannot be hid. We cannot hide ourselves from God. We cannot escape from this burden of personal responsibility; it is one of those

burdens of which it is said, 'Every man shall bear his own burden'; and it is to make us know and feel this that again and again, 'in the cool of the day,' there comes to us all the call, in mercy, 'Where art thou?'

In mercy—ah, yes! and we thank God for it.

We may, indeed, well thank Him that in His holy Word He has given us this sad story in all its details. For dark and sad though it be, it is still lit up by a ray of light, and hope comes in to check despair. For in that garden, once so peaceful, so fair and so bright, but now stained and darkened by man's first sin—then and there, as the curse fell upon the tempter, and as the sentence of punishment was pronounced upon the sinner—then and there was given also the promise of One Who should come to 'destroy the works of the devil' and 'open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.' The promised 'Seed of the woman,' who should bruise the serpent's head.

That promise has now been fulfilled. That promised advent is now an accomplished fact. The Incarnate God has lived on earth as man, and for man has died—died upon the tree. Oh, the mighty power of that perfect obedience, 'obedience unto death, even the death of the cross'!

Fulfilled is now what David told
In true prophetic song of old,
How God the heathen's King should be :
For God is reigning from the Tree.

O Tree of glory, Tree most fair,
Ordained those Holy Limbs to bear,
How bright in purple robe it stood,
The purple of a Saviour's Blood!

Once man through disobedience took of the fruit of

Q

the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and did eat and died, and was expelled from Paradise, that he might not in his disobedience take of the Tree of Life.

Now the Son of God, through obedience, perfectly overcoming evil with good, has borne the penalty of man's disobedience : and now man, through the power of that tremendous Sacrifice, is admitted, in obedience, to take of the Tree of Life, and eat and live for ever. Jesus said, 'I am the True Vine,' and He also said, 'I am the Living Bread which came down from Heaven : if any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever.'

Oh, the wonderful love of God that passeth knowledge ! Once man fled to hide himself from God amongst the trees of the garden ; now man may fly to the tree of glory to hide himself in God. 'Ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God.'

Everyone who now hears His voice calling and saying, 'Where art thou ?' may, if only he will, give a better answer than that of Adam of old. Not as then : 'I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself' ; but now : 'O Lord Jesus Christ, Saviour of the world, I heard Thy voice pleading for me and saying, "Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do." I heard Thy voice calling unto me and saying, "Come unto Me all ye that travail, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." O blessed Jesu, who didst die for me, "I flee unto Thee to hide me." I am sinful and poor, and blind, naked, and wretched ; but I am here—here, kneeling in bitter penitence in the shadow of Thy cross, the tree of glory and of life. O, give me pardon and peace. Give me the riches of Thy grace, the light of Thy truth, the clothing of Thy righteousness. "O Saviour of the

world, Who by Thy cross and precious Blood hast redeemed me, save me and help me, I humbly beseech Thee, O Lord." I am here ; I cast my burden of responsibility at the foot of Thy cross ; I do not seek to evade it, I would not shrink from bearing it, but I cannot bear it alone. But Thou hast promised to sustain me. Thou hast caused Thy prophet to say to me, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee." "Where art thou ?" "Here, dear Lord, under the shadow of Thy cross. O, save me, for Thy mercy's sake."

II.

*RESPONSIBILITY WITH REGARD TO
OTHERS.*

‘Where is Abel thy brother?’—GENESIS, iv. 9.

THE first question put by God to fallen man was that addressed to Adam in the Garden of Eden, ‘Where art thou?’

The first result of the fall, as it showed itself in Adam’s action, was the effort, on his part, to escape from the personal responsibility placed upon him by his act of disobedience: he tried first to hide himself from Him to Whom he knew himself to be accountable. By his act of sin his eyes had been opened to the greatness, the majesty, and the awfulness of the justice of God against whom he had sinned; to the fact that separation between himself and God had been effected by his sin; to something of the shame and disgrace that he had brought upon himself; and to the fact that death which he had courted was now to be his lot; and then in his terror and remorse, as the consciousness of all this came to him, he tried to hide himself from God amongst the trees of the garden.

Then, to show him that he could not be hid, that he could not thus escape, the voice of God called to him, and said, ‘Where art thou?’ Still trying to evade his

responsibility, he answered, 'I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.' He was compelled to acknowledge the real cause of his fear. 'Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?' He was compelled at last to acknowledge his act, but still he tried to escape from his responsibility, and again finding an excuse he answered, 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat'—thus trying to throw the responsibility upon Eve, upon one of the best gifts that God had given him, and therefore indirectly upon God Himself, the Giver of the gift. But he had nothing to plead that could avail to arrest judgment, and the sentence of punishment was pronounced.

We come now to speak of the second of these questions which are recorded as having been put by God to man, viz., that put by the Almighty to Cain: 'Where is Abel thy brother?' As the sad story goes on we see sin ever developing step by step, and as sin thus develops and goes on growing, we see also this question of responsibility extending itself and widening out.

Adam and Eve expelled from Paradise have gone forth into the world to work out their destiny, in pain and sorrow, in toil and labour.

But they had not been driven out of Paradise without hope, for the promise that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head had been given; and the hope inspired by that promise, the fulfilment of which was henceforth to be the desire of all nations, had been revived once again, as first Cain and then Abel had been born to them.

The brothers, now grown up to man's estate, brought

their offerings to God ; but alas ! even here in the matter of the worship of the Almighty, in which all should have been marked by obedience and self-sacrifice, disobedience and self-will on the part of man again asserted themselves.

From the very moment that sin entered into the world through Adam's transgression, man had been beyond all question taught by God that henceforth sacrifice was to enter into the question of worship as one of its essential elements. And for this reason ; Adam by his disobedience had cast away the perfect life which God had given him, and therefore before forgiveness could be possible for him, it was necessary that a perfect life should be offered back to God in satisfaction for that sin.

Forgiveness is not the easy, simple thing that we are sometimes tempted to think it. It is not entirely dependent upon the will of the offended one ; it is not the mere remission of penalty on the part of the offended ; it involves far more than that. Forgiveness is the restoration of the relations between the offended and the offender which existed before the offence was committed ; and in order that this may be possible there must be on the part of the one who has committed the offence, and thereby changed those relations, first sorrow for the act, secondly confession of the act, and lastly full satisfaction made for the wrong done by the act.

There are, and there ever must be, two parties in the case of forgiveness : the one against whom the wrong has been done, and the one who has done the wrong. On the one side there must be perfect willingness to forgive ; but this of itself is not sufficient ; forgiveness cannot take place unless there be, on the other side, repentance ; and repentance consists of contrition, confession,

and satisfaction. Unless these three conditions be fulfilled by the offender, forgiveness in the full and perfect sense—that is to say, the restoration of those relations which existed between the two parties to it before the offence was committed—is impossible.

Now, man could repent by God's grace so far as contrition and confession went ; he could be sorry for his sin ; he could acknowledge his fault. But, though he could make some satisfaction, yet he could not make that full and perfect satisfaction which was necessary and sufficient to forgiveness, inasmuch as he could not in his fallen state offer to God a perfect life in satisfaction for that which Adam had cast away. This could only be done by a perfect, a sinless man. Of Adam's race there were none good, no, not one ; and therefore the eternal Son of God became man, that as man He might offer to God the Perfect Sacrifice which alone could take away sin and make forgiveness possible for man.

It was this great truth that was to be impressed upon man's consciousness, and therefore, from the moment of the fall, he was taught that all his worship of God was to be a worship, with sacrifice, leading up to, and pointing forward to, that perfect Sacrifice on Calvary ; and we see this law of worship being taught with ever increasing intensity of meaning as the ages passed by. Abel offered of the firstlings of his flock, one out of many. Noah, after the Flood, offered some out of the very few creatures which had been saved to replenish the earth—the principle of sacrificial worship still more intense. Abraham was bid to offer his only son—the principle of sacrificial worship intensified in the highest degree. And then, as time went on, this law of worship was still more fully taught to the Chosen People, and more clearly laid

down in detail by the law given through Moses, and in all the sacrifices of the Temple.

God's law then was that the worship offered to Him by man should be a worship with sacrifice.

This law of worship was obeyed by Abel, but disobeyed by Cain. Abel brought 'of the firstlings of his flock,' but 'Cain brought of the fruit of the ground.'

The sacrifice offered in obedience was accepted; the offering made in disobedience was rejected.

Duty to God is the very foundation of all morality of life; it is the corner-stone upon which the whole of the structure of man's duty rests. If duty to God be disregarded, it inevitably follows that duty to man will be neglected.

So it was in the case of Cain. He had disregarded his duty to God. Disobedience and self-will had shewn themselves in his act of worship, and his duty to his brother was not performed. There follows all the sad story of envy, hatred, and malice on the part of Cain: he had disregarded God's law of worship; his offering had been rejected, and, resenting it, he directs his envy, hatred, and malice against his brother, whose sacrifice offered in obedience had been accepted. He is not, however, left without warning. God dealt very patiently and very tenderly with him.

There was the warning not to add sin to sin. There was the promise of acceptance, if only he would be obedient. There was the earnest pleading of God with him, calling him to repentance: 'Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?'

But the appeal was unheeded, and the call was rejected, and the sin went on growing until it very soon ob-

tained the entire mastery over the heart in which it had been cherished. Then there followed the treacherous action. Cain enticed his brother out into the field ; there was the irritating talk, the trying to provoke a quarrel, and at last the murderous blow was given, and now blood has stained the once fair earth which God had created very good.

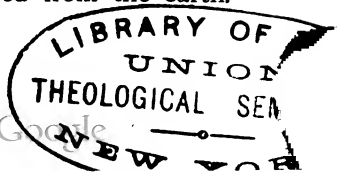
Ah, what horror must have filled the soul of that angry man as death, a now accomplished fact, first met his gaze—as his brother lay there speechless and motionless, and as the crimson tide dyed the ground !

Hurriedly, perhaps, the body was hidden away out of sight ; horror-struck Cain fled from the spot. But there was no escape possible for him, and to his fear-haunted conscience there came the voice of God saying to him, ‘Where is Abel thy brother ?’

And now it is no longer as it was in the case of Adam, a question of trying to evade responsibility by the making of excuses, but now the question is answered by direct falsehood, accompanied by the distinct repudiation of all responsibility. ‘I know not. Am I my brother’s keeper ?’

Once again the sentence of punishment is pronounced. In the earlier scene, the earth was cursed because of the sin of Adam. ‘Cursed is the ground for thy sake ; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.’ ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground ; for out of it wast thou taken : for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.’ The earth was cursed for man’s sake, but still it was to yield its fruits, though at the cost of man’s toil and sorrow.

But now it is man that is ‘cursed from the earth.



The ground stained with the blood he has shed is never again to yield her strength for him : a fugitive is he henceforth to be, and a vagabond upon the face of the earth.

Now we notice here, how, as sin has gone on growing and developing, so also has this question of responsibility widened out and extended itself.

If the first question put by God to man, 'Where art thou?' teaches us that there is a burden of responsibility with regard to ourselves from which we cannot escape—a burden which we must bear each for himself, and which apart from God's help would crush us, but which by His help we may be able to bear—so this second question teaches us that we are responsible for others, that there is a social responsibility resting upon each of us, and that we must face it. We are all, therefore, concerned in this question, 'Where is Abel thy brother?'

Now let us take this question as addressed to ourselves individually, and let us lay it well to heart. It is a very serious question, it calls for an answer, it must be answered. May God give us grace to answer it aright! And, first of all, we will consider the question so far as it relates to all those who are near and dear to us; all those whose names and faces are familiar to us; all those who are connected with us by the bonds of kindred or affection. 'Where is Abel thy brother?' Parents, wife, husband, children, all that inner circle of friends and relations, all whom we acknowledge to have been, in some sense or other, committed by God to our safe keeping and care. 'Where is Abel thy brother?'

Now, in relation to those who are thus near and

dear to us, let us ask ourselves some such questions as the following :

What have I done for the temporal welfare of all those who are so closely connected with me by ties of kindred, and who ought to be so bound up with me in the bonds of affection, as to be included in the term 'brethren.' Have I diligently worked for them, and tried in every way to advance their best interests ? Then as to their social happiness. Have I thought for them, and cared for them, putting away all selfish thoughts and motives ? Have I, by purity, love, and gentleness, done my part towards making their life bright, happy, and lovely, and such as it ought to be ?

Then, again, as to the intellectual training and welfare of the children : where are they as to this, so far as I have had to do with the matter ? Have I, as far as I possibly could, given them a good education and wise instruction, such as is best calculated to enable them to take their proper place in the world, amongst those with whom it is reasonable to expect that they will be placed ; having in my mind a high and noble, but not in any sense a foolish or extravagant ambition as to their future ? Has this education been carried on with due regard to their higher powers ? Have I tried to instil into them the importance of the training of the conscience and the duty of obeying it ? How about their knowledge of the Faith ? Do they know, and do they understand, the great dogmas of the Faith ? Have they an intelligent knowledge of the great verities of the Christian religion ? Where are they so far as the matter of their religious knowledge goes ? Do I know where they are ? ' Where is Abel thy brother ? '

All these are very serious questions ; they are questions which we shall do well to ask ourselves.

But this is by no means all. What is the peculiar characteristic of murder that makes it the horrible thing that it is ?

We think that the answer to that question is to be found in the ninth chapter of the book Genesis, in the commandment given by God to man after the Flood, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.' Why ? 'For in the image of God made He man.'

It is in the destroying the image of God that lies the essence of murder : that is the peculiar characteristic of the crime which makes it the horrible thing that it is. And if that be so, then it follows that whoever destroys the image of God in the soul of another is marked with the brand of Cain.

The image of God is stamped upon every soul born into the world. That image is, since the Fall, marred and defaced, it is true ; but still it is there. The work of God the Holy Ghost is the restoration of that image, the bringing it out more and more brightly, clearly, and distinctly. Ah ! then the question, looked at from this point of view, becomes invested with a meaning of terrible importance. 'Where is Abel thy brother ?'

What have I done to help forward that work of the restoration of the image of God in the soul of my brother ? Have I done anything to hinder that work, or to obscure that image ?

The question is a most serious one. Let us look at it a little more closely and consider it somewhat in detail.

First, then, there is the question of the example which

I have set before others, especially before those of my own household who come day by day, in a greater or less degree, under the influence of my example. What has the influence of my example been? Have I by it led those thus committed to my safe keeping nearer to, or further from, God? Have they seen or heard me make light of sin? Have they seen me careless or neglectful as to the worship of God? Have they seen me lax in the observance of His laws? Has my life been a real help to them in their spiritual life, or has it in any sense laid stumbling-blocks in their way?

Again, there is not only the question of example, but there is also that of precept. Have I tried with all my power to teach them as well as to lead them in the right way? Have I watched with prudent care the teaching they have received from others, as well as that which I myself have given them? What kind of wise and prudent supervision have I exercised over the books they have read? Have I been careful that the tone of conversation in the home should be such as to maintain, clear and strong, the purity and the faith of my household? And is not this question of the tone and character of conversation one which needs special attention in the present day. Is it generally speaking incapable of improvement? 'Where is Abel thy brother?

Then there is also the question of my prayers. Have I been very careful to surround all my dear ones with that shield of protection?

We are all anxious, are we not, that our children should do well and get on in life? We very eagerly and earnestly seek, in their behalf, the influence of those who may be able to help them on. We leave nothing undone that will advance their temporal welfare. And these efforts

are right ; beyond all question it is our duty to make them. But are we so earnest, or so diligent, as we ought to be in our daily intercessions to Him Who alone can give to them the highest of all blessings, viz., the grace to lead a pure and holy life ?

Now as regards this aspect of the question of our responsibility, we do not suggest that any one of us would for a moment wish to deny it, or to repudiate it. We all accept it. Those thus near and dear to us, are placed in our safe keeping. We acknowledge it. But the question for each of us to consider is this : Do I really keep the thought of this responsibility sufficiently before me, and do I really discharge my obligations in all this as I ought to do ?

The matter, however, reaches further out than this. Responsibility rests upon us, in some way or other, with regard to every one with whom we are brought into contact : the friends and acquaintances of our life ; all those with whom we have business relations ; the various members of that circle of society in which we move ; our more casual acquaintances ; the fellow-travellers we meet on our journeys—there is a responsibility resting upon us with regard to them all.

‘Where is thy brother ?’ Where is he, morally and spiritually, so far as the influence, however slight it may have been, which I have exercised over him goes ?

To have laughed at the evil or profane joke ; to have spoken the thoughtless, the foolish or the angry word ; to have exhibited irritability or impatience—to say nothing of far more grievous stumbling-blocks than these—must have had some influence over others.

Ah, alas ! who is there who has not, at some time or other, said and done something the effect of which was

evil on some one else?—something tending to deface in the soul of another the image of God; something which tended to lead that soul into temptation, if not into sin.

What marvellous opportunities have been afforded us in life of helping others to resist temptation, and to stand firm! How have these opportunities been used? Have we used them at all? 'Where is thy brother?' The question is a very searching one.

But the matter of our responsibility extends even further yet than this. There is a responsibility resting upon us with regard to everyone who is included in the term, 'our neighbour.' Who is my neighbour? 'My neighbour is everyone who, with me, is by the grace of God capable of eternal life.' That is perhaps the best definition we can find of the term 'my neighbour.' Everyone, therefore, without distinction of age, or class, or nation or race, is in this sense my brother—the great brotherhood of mankind, all for whom our dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ died.

Ah, how the question widens out as we think of it! Have we ever truly realised that in some sense we are responsible to God for those whom we may never have even seen? We say responsible in some sense because the responsibility extends only so far as does our power to help. 'Where is thy brother?' What have I done of my alms to stay or to alleviate, in ever so slight a degree, that poverty which, with all its carking cares, so often ends in crushing out hope and bringing despair? What have I done by quietly, and consistently, living the faith I profess to strengthen the faith of others, and thus to check the spread of that irreligion which is so common in the world around me? What have I done

by a life of purity, in thought, word and deed, to help others to resist evil, and to stay the tide of that evil laxity of morals that is destroying the manhood of the nation? What have I done by my prayers and by my alms to spread abroad the light of the Gospel of Christ in the dark places of the earth : not merely in the dark places of heathendom, but also in the dark places at home, which the mere light of a refined civilisation can never of itself brighten? 'Where is thy brother?' The question is indeed a very, very serious one.

But there is also yet another meaning which may be found in the question. It comes to all who are striving to live in union with Jesus Christ, not only in the sense in which we have been speaking of it, but also with another meaning, and one in which a very blessed answer may be given to it.

Abel was a type of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Abel's sacrifice was the first recorded type of the Sacrifice on Calvary. It was in connection with his sacrifice that Abel was slain by his brother.

The Incarnate God was not ashamed to call us his brethren. Jesus Christ is my Brother.

Abel was slain by his brother. Jesus Christ was nailed to His Cross by my sins.

Abel's blood for vengeance
Pleaded to the skies,
But the blood of Jesus
For our pardon cries.

Ah ! then again, as I hear the voice of God calling to me and saying, 'Where is thy brother?' I may fly for shelter to the Cross of Christ. May God give me grace to answer and to say, 'Here is my Brother, slain by my sins, yet giving His life to save me from them,' and to

plead that precious Blood which calls now, not for vengeance on me, but, for my pardon. 'Oh, forgive me and bless me, for His dear sake !'

'Where is thy Brother ?'

Here in my heart held fast by all my best affections. Here in my life, as I cling closely to Him and strive to walk with Him.

'Where is thy Brother ?'

There at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ever interceding for me.

O sweetest Blood, that can implore
Pardon of God, and heaven restore,
The heaven which sin had lost :
While Abel's blood for vengeance pleads,
What Jesus shed still intercedes
For those who wrong Him most.

III.

*RESPONSIBILITY
WITH REGARD TO OUR WORK.*

‘What doest thou here, Elijah?’—1 KINGS xix. 9.

GOD’S glory promoted by, and manifested in, the happiness of man is to be the end and aim of the spiritual life. The spiritual life is the ordinary daily life lived in union with Jesus Christ and having this end in view. Life so lived has its responsibilities, and these must be fully realised and acted up to.

We have seen from the story of Adam, and from the question put by God to him, ‘Where art thou?’ that there is a burden of responsibility with regard to ourselves which we must bear, each one for himself—a burden which we could not bear alone in our own strength, but to bear which God will by his grace give us the strength we need.

From the story of Cain, and from the question put to him by God, ‘Where is Abel thy brother?’ we have learned that there is resting on us a responsibility with regard to others which we must recognise, and which, in union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, we are enabled to discharge.

And now we shall try to see in the history of Elijah that there is a responsibility placed upon us with regard

to our work in life, a responsibility which even the most zealous soul is apt to forget in the face of the crushing and overwhelming difficulties which at times meet it.

Long centuries have passed by since the scene of which we were last speaking, and now again we come to one of those startling and searching questions put by God to man :

‘ What doest thou here, Elijah ? ’

Now, first of all, we will endeavour to understand how it came about that this question was put to the prophet, and put to him here in Mount Horeb, so far away from the scene of his appointed labours.

Elijah was alone in the weird and desolate region of Mount Horeb. He had arrived there after a long and weary journey across the desert, and he had for awhile taken up his abode in a cave on the mountain side.

Now it was but natural that, in his solitude, he should ponder over the strange events of the past ; and very strange, indeed, they had been.

His mind would naturally wander back into the past, and as he reviewed it he would remember how he had been sent by the Almighty to rebuke the wickedness of Ahab, and to pronounce God’s sentence of punishment both upon the king and upon the people, by foretelling the three years’ drought ; then there had been, during that long period of distress, first the solitude by the brook Cherith, and afterwards the sojourn at the widow’s house at Zarephath, where his prayer had been so wonderfully answered, as the widow’s son was restored to life ; and as her provision of food first offered to God’s prophet had been miraculously increased.

Towards the close of the long period of famine, he had again been sent to meet Ahab, and he had challenged

the king and his false prophets, with all Israel, to meet him on Mount Carmel. His thoughts, no doubt, dwelt upon the marvellous scene that was there enacted.

The king and all the princes of the nation ; the prophets of Baal, in all their pride and confidence ; the vast sea of faces that surrounded the altar that had been built ; the cries and shouts of the priests of Baal ; he remembered how, as the day went on, he had lashed them with his sarcasms ; then he remembered yet far more distinctly the quiet and the calm of intense expectation that had succeeded to this scene of wild excitement. The repairing the altar of God and the ordering of the sacrifice ; and, as the time of the evening sacrifice drew near, how he had lifted up his heart to God in intensely earnest prayer ; and how God had vouchsafed to give in answer to his prayer that wonderful and startling manifestation of His power and His presence, as the fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice and licked up the water with which it had been drenched. His prayer had been answered ; and the success of his mission seemed to have been secured, as there went up from the lips of thousands the great ringing cry of firm conviction : ' The Lord, He is the God ; the Lord, He is the God.' And with the destruction of the prophets of Baal the great moral victory for God and for God's truth seemed to have been won.

Then he had prayed for the removal of the temporal punishment. On the top of Carmel he had cast him down in humble thankfulness and earnest entreaty, praying on and on in patient perseverance, and at last his prayer was again answered—the little cloud like a man's hand rising out of the sea, heralding the advent of the blessing that he had prayed for. And he had sent

the message announcing to Ahab the coming blessing : 'Prepare thy chariot and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.' And, with joy and thankfulness in his heart, he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. Ah ! that day's history could never be obliterated from his memory. A great blow had been struck at Baal worship ; the heart of the people had been turned back to God, for the moment at least, and they had declared themselves as ready to follow Him. Ahab had apparently been touched. Elijah was there ready at hand to advise and to help him in any wise line of action which he might adopt, and to second it with the promise of success.

But, alas ! this was not all that he now remembered ; there was the bitterness of the disappointment that followed so soon. There were Jezebel's deep-rooted hatred and violent threats of persecution, and the prophet had fled for his life from the land he had loved so well and the people whom he had so faithfully served. In the wilderness in his flight he had paused, and there he had prayed that God would take away his life, as in despondency he thought of the heart-breaking failure of all his hopes and of all his efforts.

In the strength of the miraculous food then given him he had toiled on to Horeb, and here, in his solitude and in his sadness, he was pondering over all this strange and eventful past, and also perhaps wondering what the future history of the nation might be, though in that future history, so far as he could see, he was himself no longer to have any part.

And as he was thus musing in sadness of heart, the word of the Lord came to him and He said unto him, 'What doest thou here, Elijah ?'

It was a question full of meaning ; the most startling and searching question, arresting his attention at once with an irresistible attraction, bringing all his thoughts at once into a focus, and causing them to search right down into the very depths of his soul, and revealing to him in a new light all those things that he had been pondering over. ‘What doest thou here, Elijah?’

And do we know nothing of questions such as this ? questions which come to us from time to time in our lives ; questions which startle us by their suddenness, and seem to speak to us all the more fully because of their very brevity ? Do we know nothing of such questions as these, which compel our attention by the fact of their being, so to speak, all point ; questions which first fasten the attention upon the present, and then, compelling retrospection, demand that the conscience shall pronounce judgment upon the present in its relation to the past ; questions which compel us to take stock of our position, and either to justify it or to give it up ?

Surely such questions do come to us all from time to time. Every one of us has had some experience of them. Here was just one of such questions put to the prophet by God. ‘What doest thou here, Elijah?’

The question at once brought the prophet face to face with all that had led up to his present position there in Mount Horeb. By it he was compelled there and then once more to review the past, and to decide whether that past did justify his present action.

It is to be noticed that the question, though it demands retrospection, is not a question as to the past, but as to the present. It is not ‘What hast thou done elsewhere in the past?’ but ‘What doest thou here now?’

And as Elijah heard it, his conscience interpreted

its meaning. He once more recalls in rapid succession all those events in the past over which he had been brooding: his mission from God, his first meeting with Ahab, the drought and famine, the brook Cherith, the widow's house, the answer to prayer, the second meeting with Ahab, the scene on Carmel, the joy of success, the bitterness of disappointment, the persecution of Jezebel, the flight in fear, the refreshment in the wilderness, the long plodding across the desert, and the solitude of Horeb.

And, as the recollection flashed through his mind, his conscience interpreted the question, 'What doest thou here, Elijah?' into such self-searchings as these: 'Why am I here? Did God bid me come here, or have I merely wandered on here without any definite aim or purpose? What did I come here to do? Was it zeal for God's glory that brought me here? I was sent to do battle against sin, and especially against idolatry; am I here to carry out my mission, and to do so more energetically and more effectually? What is this brooding over the past to lead to? Why am I here, and what answer can I give?' Thus, hearing the question, he put it to himself: 'What doest thou here, Elijah?'

Now let us notice here one or two further points about this question. In itself it was startling and searching, but it compelled attention also by the time and place in which it was put to the prophet. It came to him when he was alone on the weird mountain side; nature all round him was speaking her quiet, solemn lessons through the lofty mountains, the great bold rocks and the valley beneath, as they were lit up by the sun or as the clouds drifted over or across them. He was far from the haunts of men, from all the persecution of the court; removed from

the noise and passions, the clamour and the fickleness of the multitudes amongst whom he had lately moved. He was alone with his thoughts, and those thoughts were occupied in meditating upon all that had led to his being there, when the question came to him, 'What doest thou here, Elijah?'

We notice also that the question is pressed in upon him by the fact that he is addressed by name: 'What doest thou here, Elijah?'

There is a marvellous power to attract and compel attention in the sound of one's name. Of all sounds it is perhaps the most familiar to us, and yet it is a sound which never loses its power over us. We know that it is, of all others, the sound which most effectually touches the heart; and not only are we ourselves constantly subject to its power, but we also instinctively make use of it continually when we would specially arrest the attention, convince the mind, or move the affections of those to whom we speak, and give emphasis to our words: and it is to be noticed that Almighty God in His love constantly makes use of this gentle and touching power of appeal. Over and over again we find instances of this recorded. He called to Adam in his disobedience and said, 'Where art thou?' To Abraham, in that marvellously faithful obedience which won for him the title of 'the friend of God,' in that obedience which was ready, if it were the will of God, to plunge the uplifted knife into the heart of his son, his only son Isaac, there came the call from heaven, 'Abraham, Abraham,' and his hand was stayed. To Samuel, in his obedient and watchful discharge of duty, God spake and called him, saying, 'Samuel, Samuel.' To Martha in the midst of her domestic cares came the soothing voice of the

Saviour, 'Martha, Martha.' To Lazarus in the sleep of death there was spoken the command of Omnipotence, 'Lazarus, come forth.' To Judas in his awful sin there was the last call to repentance—ah, how tenderly spoken!—'Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?' To St. Peter in his impulsive zeal came the message of warning, 'I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest Me.' To Mary Magdalene in her penitent sorrow and love the risen Saviour revealed Himself in the garden in the growing light of the early dawn, as He called her by name and said, 'Mary.' To St. Thomas in his restored faith Jesus said, 'Thomas, because thou hast seen thou hast believed; blessed are they which have not seen and yet have believed.' To St. Peter in his repentance there was addressed the loving question, 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?' To St. Paul in his misdirected zeal there was put the converting question, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?' And so here also to Elijah in his despondency there is put by God the question, enforced by the personal appeal contained in the sound of the name, 'What doest thou here, Elijah?'

And now let us for a few moments turn our thoughts to ourselves. Let us commune with our own hearts and be still. Let us try to hear the voice of God calling us by name and saying to us, 'What doest thou here?' and let conscience interpret that question to us. Have I really arrived at my present position, moral or spiritual, by the direct command of God? or have I merely, so to speak, wandered and drifted into it, or been driven into it by outward circumstances, without my having any definite aim or purpose in view? Am I

really diligently and faithfully doing my duty, my work, in that sphere of labour in which God has been pleased to place me? or have I for some cause or other left it and wandered away from it? Am I now really using my opportunities to the greatest advantage? or am I merely wasting them in unprofitable brooding over the past, or in idle dreaming as to the future? 'What doest thou here?'

I find myself here in this world; I know that I am here but for a time; I was created for eternity; I have been redeemed and restored to the order of eternal life by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, my God and Saviour; I am being guided and sanctified by God the Holy Spirit, that I may at last enter into my inheritance of glory and bliss. What am I doing here, I for whom so much has been, and is being, done? Am I living here as though this was my true home, all my affections and thoughts fixed upon the things of time and sense? or am I living here as I ought to be living, as on a pilgrimage, ever hoping at last to reach my resting-place in 'the land that is very far off?' I am here in the Church of Christ with all the gifts, graces, and opportunities therein afforded me. 'What am I doing?'

My daily life is passed here in the home surrounded by all the blessings God has given me, here where others are clinging to me, looking up to me for help and guidance, influenced by me for good or evil: What am I doing here? These questions are well worth our asking. What answers can be given to them?

And if the question put to Elijah be one which we ought to put to ourselves, it is certain that the prophet's answer is also well deserving of careful consideration.

Elijah could give an answer to the question, 'What

doest thou here, Elijah ? ' and imperfect, in one sense, as that answer was, it was nevertheless a good answer. He said, ' I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts : for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword ; and I, even I only, am left ; and they seek my life, to take it away.'

He could, indeed, give a good account of the past. He had done his work, and he had done it splendidly. Happy we, if we can give so good an account of our work in the past.

But, after all, his answer was hardly a perfect answer to the question put, viz., ' What doest thou here ? ' It was simply a statement of what he had done elsewhere. A true statement, no doubt, and conscientiously made ; but what he failed to see was that his answer did not justify his present position and attitude.

He had yet his lesson to learn, viz., that the very zeal which he now pleaded in his justification was that which had placed a stumbling-block in his way. Not that he had been too zealous, but that his zeal had both been too narrow-sighted and had also lacked somewhat in perseverance.

He had done his very best, and the result, from his point of view, had been utter failure ; he imagined that there remained no one else faithful ; so far as he could see, the cause was utterly lost, and the case was hopeless ; for a little moment, he had given way to despondency, and he had left his post because he thought that all was lost. He had forgotten that his responsibility as to his work extended only to the faithful discharge of duty, and he had taken upon himself a responsibility which belonged to God alone, that of determining the

conditions under which he was to withdraw from his work.

And now he was to learn his lesson ; and we notice in the story the wonderful gentleness with which God dealt with his zealous servant. He was told to go and stand upon the mount before the Lord.

He obeyed, and as he stood there the heralds of the great King passed by.

First, there was the mighty wind that rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks in its fury and rage. Then there was the earthquake, which made all nature reel and tremble. And after it there was the fire which drove all before it, and left destruction and desolation behind it, as it swept past in its consuming power.

And then, after the wind and the earthquake and the fire, there came 'a still, small voice, and it was so when Elijah heard it that he wrapped his face in his mantle.'

The wind in its fury, the earthquake with its terrors, and the fire in its vehemence, all these appealed to the prophet, they were in harmony with his disturbed thoughts and with his highly-wrought feelings. He could contemplate them without fear, and watch with exultation the destruction they worked. For they spoke to him of those manifestations of power whereby he had hitherto thought that God's will could alone be accomplished.

But when he heard the still small voice, he wrapped his face in his mantle. Ah ! now he was beginning to learn the lesson he needed. He realised the great truth that behind the wind and the earthquake and the fire there was something yet far greater ; and in the still small voice he recognised the truth that God is greater

than any manifestations of His power. He knew that God was there, and he covered his face.

And then the question was repeated : ' What doest thou here, Elijah ? '

Now there was here, on Elijah's part, no trying to evade responsibility, as in the case of Adam ; there was no repudiation of responsibility, as in the case of Cain. But he had not yet clearly seen how he had failed, and so, in the integrity of his soul, he again lays his plea humbly, but fearlessly, before God : ' I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts : for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword ; and I, even I only, am left ; and they seek my life, to take it away.'

Now see how gently and how lovingly God dealt with his zealous, but almost broken-hearted, servant. There was no sharp rebuke. As in the wilderness some weeks before, when he prayed that God would take away his life, for his work had failed and he thought himself useless, there had been no sharp rebuke, but there had been given him just that which he then needed for his wearied body and mind, viz., the refreshment of food and sleep. So now is granted to him just what he most needs to cheer his sorrowful soul, and to revive his drooping spirit, viz., the refreshment afforded by a partial unfolding of God's purpose, and fresh commands calling him back to a sense of responsibility and duty.

He was told to go back and anoint a prophet to succeed him. This threw a new light over the whole of his work and his mission. He had never dreamed of this ; hitherto he had measured God's work by the foot-

rule of his own labours, and he had thought that it had all to be done by him, and in his day, or not at all.

He was further told to anoint two kings who should yet have their parts to play in God's great plan. He had never thought of that.

He was told that the land from which he had fled, and which he thought had utterly forsaken God, still contained seven thousand souls faithful and true. The cause which he supposed to be hopelessly lost had yet a great host of loyal adherents. He who thought that he was left alone was told that he had yet seven thousand on his side.

Ah! here was a new revelation as to his work. Here was more work for him yet to do. He saw the folly of his prayer that God would take away his life; he saw the folly of idly brooding over the past; he thanked God for the fresh work given him; his heart revived; he accepted his responsibility; he saw it all in a new light; he realised that it was not for him to determine when or how his work should cease, but that his duty was simply to obey. And with hope revived and with energy renewed he returned to his work, braving all dangers and facing all difficulties.

Now let us try to learn our lesson from this story.

First, there is surely this lesson: we are never to think that God has forsaken us or that our work is done, because we cannot for the moment see any way of removing the difficulties which appear to surround the working out of God's purpose, whether in the world or in the church, or in our own personal life. And truly this is a lesson which most of us need to learn. Difficulties surround us; our work seems to all appearance useless; for a little while there may be some sign

of success, and then disappointment follows, as the apparent success ends in the still more apparent failure ; we grow disheartened, and we are ready to give it all up ; and all this leads to distrust of God, and to despondency, and to exaggerated views of difficulty.

Never let us forget that there are forces on our side, unseen indeed by us, but known to God. We are never left alone in the great battle of life which we have to fight for good against evil. The saints and the angels are on our side, all that great company bound together in the communion of saints—all that great host typified by the seven thousand who had not ‘ bowed the knee to Baal.’

And then there is this other lesson : responsibility as to our work extends only to the faithful discharge of duty. We are not responsible for the results of our work, but we are responsible for its performance. God may grant us success which we can see ; if so, let us thank Him for His mercy. But we must remember that He does not demand of us success in our own sense of the word. All that He demands from us is faithful effort. The result is with Him. We are not even in a position to judge of success or failure, for we know but a very small part of His plan. Never let us take upon ourselves the responsibility which belongs to Him alone, viz., that of determining the time at which or the conditions under which our work is to cease. But let us be on our guard, for this is the temptation that is constantly coming to us : ‘ It is no use trying, I may as well give it all up.’ ‘ Nothing seems to succeed, it is all a long string of failures.’ ‘ I am no better than my fathers ; take away my life.’ We all know something of that kind of temptation, do we not ?

IV.

*RESPONSIBILITY WITH REGARD TO
OUR CALLING.*

‘What have I done to Thee?’—I KINGS xix. 20.

WE were speaking last of the question put by God to Elijah in Mount Horeb. The question was, though a very short one, very full of meaning. It at once arrested his attention; it compelled him to review the past in its bearing upon the present; and it demanded that his conscience should then and there speak as to whether the past did, or did not, justify his position in the present.

‘What doest thou here, Elijah?’

It was a question which called for retrospection as well as for introspection, and it fastened his attention upon the matter of his responsibility with regard to the work which God had given him to do. And by it he was led to see his error in taking upon himself the responsibility which belonged to God alone, of determining the conditions, both of time and circumstance, which would justify his giving up that work. And from the story we tried to draw this lesson: that our responsibility with regard to the work which God gives us to do extends only to the faithful discharge of duty. Ah! how much more bright and hopeful, how much

more free from worry and distraction, and how much more energetic would our lives be if we constantly bore this truth in mind, that God crowns not the visible result of our work but the faithful effort we make to do it.

Now there is not only resting upon us responsibility with regard to ourselves, with regard to others, and with regard to the work which God has given us to do ; but there is also the question of our responsibility with regard to our Christian calling, and it is of this vocation, and the responsibility attaching to it, that we have now to speak.

And, again, basing what we have to say on one of the Old Testament stories, we will go on to consider the question put by God through His prophet Elijah to Elisha, whom God had bid him anoint to succeed him in the prophetic work and office. 'What have I done to thee?' It was another short and startling question, but it was, like those we have already considered, wonderfully full of meaning.

So far as we know, the two men had never met before. Elijah had, we know, heard of Elisha, for God had distinctly pointed him out to Elijah by name and description, and had said to him, 'Elisha, the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.' And it is hardly to be doubted that Elisha had heard much of Elijah. Even if he had not been present on the occasion of that remarkable gathering on Mount Carmel, the story of the scene enacted there, but some few weeks before, must have reached his ears ; and when the two men met there seems to have been mutual recognition.

'Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee,' said the one ; and

the other answered, 'Go back again, for what have I done to thee?' And these were the first words, so far as we know, that the two had ever addressed to each other.

Now, in order to see what it was that had led up to this petition of the one, and to this answer of the other, we will go back again for a few moments in thought to Mount Horeb.

Elijah, having fully realised his responsibility as to his work, at once returns to fulfil his mission ; with hope revived in his heart, with duty clearly defined in his mind, and with firm determination of purpose, he departed from Mount Horeb. 'So he departed thence.' That is all the record we have of his return journey. But we can easily picture him to our minds. The whole bearing of the man is changed, the contrast presented by his flight and his return is very marked. Then it was the furtive flight from danger, he was flying for his life—anxious, worn, depressed, and fearful ; now he is returning to meet danger, and death itself if need be. Then with faltering steps he was flying from duty ; now with steady gait he is returning to its discharge. Then it was irresolution and doubt begotten of following his own way ; now it is firmness, determination, and confidence, inspired by walking in 'the way of God's direction. Then 'the journey was too great for him,' but it is not so said now.

It is true that in his flight he had been sustained by God, and strengthened by the miraculous food given him, for he was in a certain sense seeking God. But after all it was in the way of his own choice and not in that of God's distinct ordering.

Ah, yes! and the way of our choice is always a 'journey that is too great for us.' The way pointed out

by God is always the easier in the end and the shorter, no matter what may be its apparent difficulties.

Well, as the prophet steadily plods his way across the desert, we see in every step he takes an evidence of his renewed zeal and of his willing obedience.

After long weeks of weary travelling, at length the familiar forms of the mountains of Moab appear in the distance and cheer his heart ; and after awhile the rich forests of his native Gilead refresh the eyes of the man of God ; and, as he still travels on, presently the rich and fertile valley of the Jordan opens out before him. Eastward the plain stretches out in all its beauty, no longer dry, parched, and brown, after the long three years drought, as when he had last seen it, when the ravens fed him in his solitary sojourn by the brook Cherith, but now once more green, and smiling, and bright after the abundance of rain. When last he had seen it signs of distress, anxiety and despair, were on all sides to be noticed ; ‘the heavens above were as brass,’ and the earth beneath hard and dry ; there was neither bread for man nor fodder for cattle, and famine was fast crushing out hope from the hearts of men. But now all was changed ; the happy, pleasant homesteads dotted along the valley were all showing signs of life ; hope had revived and all was smiling. The ploughman and the sower were everywhere busy in the field, and once more all was brightness and activity.

What a contrast too did the scene present to the weird and solemn grandeur of Horeb, and to the dry and parched desert through which the prophet had recently passed ! Elijah still pressed on with steady purpose, never resting nor turning aside from the way that leads to the place whither God had sent him ;

presently he was rewarded as Abel-meholah appeared in view.

Abel-meholah was the name of Shaphat's farm. The word means 'the meadow of the dance;' and whether the name referred to the luxuriant grass as, moved by the gentle breeze, it danced and glanced in the sunshine, or whether it implied that there merry and pleasant gatherings of village maidens were wont to be held, in either case there is an innocent and happy ring about the name, 'Abel-meholah.'

Elisha and his father, Shaphat, were manifestly well-to-do persons. As Elijah came to Abel-meholah he found Elisha out in the field superintending the ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen.

The strange, gaunt figure of the prophet was seen moving across the field; and as he passed Elisha he cast upon him his mantle, the badge of his prophetic calling. So far as we know, no word had yet been spoken; Elisha, attentive to his work, had for a moment lifted his eyes, and he had recognised, in the strange figure that passed by, the prophet of Israel, and as the mantle was cast upon him he at once understood the meaning of the symbolical act. The oxen were stopped, and the plough was left; already Elijah had passed on, pressing forward in his steady determination to do God's bidding; he had already passed nearly out of the field, soon he would have passed out of view. Elisha ran after him, and overtaking him said, 'Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee.'

The request was immediately granted, and the prophet answered, 'Go back again, for what have I done to thee?'

Elisha returned, but it was only that he might take a final farewell of his kindred and friends. The oxen

were slain and the parting feast was given to the people, the friends and companions of his youth, those with whom he had lived and worked ; and by that very act Elisha showed that his final determination had been taken to leave them all there. His affection still remained unchanged, and the feast over, with the blessing of his father and his mother resting upon him, he went forth to follow Elijah and to be henceforth his constant companion, his minister, his friend, disciple, and son.

Now let us notice a little more closely some of the points in this story which seem to call for our consideration.

First, it is manifest that Elisha at once recognised the call which he had received and its meaning ; as the mantle of the mighty Tishbite fell upon his shoulders, he knew that he was called to follow the prophet.

The mantle of humility in which Elijah had wrapped his face in Horeb had become the mantle of vocation to Elisha, and he knew it. And though he may not have understood all the glory and greatness to which that call, if obeyed, was eventually to lead him, he nevertheless did recognise to the full much of what the call meant and involved. He knew in the first place that it was a call to leave all that had hitherto been everything to him—quiet, ease, and prosperity, and the tender ties of the home life : and these must have been very sweet to one whose heart was so full of filial affection as was his who could say, ‘Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee.’ He knew that he was called to give up all the pleasant, quiet, and peaceful life he had hitherto enjoyed. He knew too that it was a call to follow the exiled and persecuted prophet, and to throw himself heart and soul into his

work—and that therefore it was a call to a life of hardship and danger ; a life the very purpose of which was to run counter to popular prejudice, to rebuke national sin, to destroy the false and restore the true worship of God ; a life that must necessarily be lived in constant opposition to the public opinion of the world, and which would consequently meet with very little of that sympathy which men for the most part hold so dear. He would have to share the prophet's poverty and hardships, dangers, and persecutions ; it was for all this that he was to give up ease, peace, quiet, and security. But he also knew something more than this ; he knew that it was a call to a life of far higher aim, far nobler purpose and more glorious destiny, than what he had hitherto perhaps always looked forward to, viz., the future peaceful possession, and profitable cultivation, of the fields of Abel-meholah ; and above all he realised that this call, though it came to him through the prophet, and though it was conveyed by the casting upon his shoulders of the prophet's mantle, was nevertheless a call from God.

Elisha, knowing all this, made his choice—and he made it at once. There was no hesitation, no holding back. The oxen were stopped, the plough was left, and in his zeal and determination he ran after the prophet.

Then it is to be noticed that in making his choice Elisha was left perfectly free and unfettered. The mantle was cast and Elijah passed on. The call was given, but he to whom it was given was left absolutely free to accept it and to obey it, or not, as he willed. The casting of the mantle conveyed the call ; Elisha's conscience interpreted it, and his will accepted it.

Doubtless, in those wonderful and mysterious ways in which God works in, and speaks to, the souls of men,

there had been much to lead up to and to prepare him to accept the call : as he followed his oxen, he would naturally recall the years of drought when the ploughing of the land was an impossibility, when the ground was dry and hard as the nether millstone for want of rain ; all the distress and fear of that time recurred to his mind ; and no doubt he thanked God, who maketh the earth soft with the drops of rain, and blesseth the increase of it, for the relief that had been sent ; and that would have led him on to think of the night when the rain began, and of the scene on Carmel which had preceded it, and so of Elijah the man of God, and of his prayer and sacrifice ; and then, while his heart was touched, and full of gratitude, as he—who doubtless was one of the ‘ seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and whose lips had not kissed him ’—was thus prepared to receive the call, he lifted up his eyes and he saw Elijah coming towards him. The mantle fell upon his shoulders, and he knew that the call had come.

Ah yes ! the love of God is great and very gentle. He prepares our hearts ; it was so in the case of Moses, it was so in the case of David, it was so in the case of St. Matthew, it was so in the case of St. Paul, and it is constantly so in his dealings with us. ‘ Lord, Thou hast heard the desire of the poor ; Thou preparest their heart, and Thine ear hearkeneth thereto.’

God had sent the rain to soften the earth, and now Elisha brought his work to bear upon the ploughing and the sowing, that the harvest might follow. So God had sent his preventing grace to soften and prepare the heart of Elisha ; and he now brought his conscience and will to bear upon the acceptance of the call, and to aid in the carrying out of God’s purpose.

Another point which we have to notice in the story is this: that having once made his choice Elisha never looked back, and he certainly never regretted it. There was, indeed, the temporary return to obtain the blessing of his father and his mother, and to give the parting feast to the friends and companions of his youth; but, as we have already said, there was in this very act the evidence of his determination of purpose. That which prompted the temporary return was the full acceptance of the call to depart. It was manifestly so, and it was thus that Elijah viewed it. 'Let me, I pray Thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee' was the pious request; and the answer was, 'Yes, go and discharge those duties which filial piety and goodwill call for, but even in doing that remember what I have done to thee. Do not forget the casting of the mantle. "Go back again, for what have I done to thee?"' That was the answer, and it was not an answer either rejecting the service offered, or implying that the call was of little or no consequence. Far from it; it was, on the contrary, the full acceptance of the service, and at the same time the solemn reminding of Elisha of the full meaning of the call. It was as though the prophet had said, 'Go back by all means and discharge these duties, it is right and fitting that thou shouldest do so; but remember that I have cast my mantle upon thee, remember that thy conscience has already rightly interpreted that act as being a call from the Most High. Be brave and persevering, for thou knowest how great a thing I have done to thee.'

Elisha accepted the full responsibility which this call involved, and, having accepted it, he never regretted it. His new duties and labours were far higher and grander

than those from which he had been called, and in the affection and friendship of the prophet he was more than repaid for the loss of the daily expression of home affections. The call came to him then to follow Elijah; the call brought its responsibilities: first to accept it, and then to remain true to it. Elisha acted up to the responsibilities thus laid upon him and enjoyed the full blessings of obedience.

Now let us turn to ourselves and see how all this applies to us. He of whom Elijah was in many ways a type, even Elijah's Lord and Master Jesus Christ of Nazareth, has passed across the field of our life and has cast his mantle upon each of us.

The mantle of humility in which He veiled for a time the glory of His Godhead in the day of His flesh. His holy Incarnation has become to each one of us the mantle of vocation, when we were made members of Him in Holy Baptism: 'members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.' Then indeed His mantle was cast upon us, and it conveyed the call to leave all and follow Him. In Confirmation again His mantle was cast upon us, as we were then clothed with the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit. And ever since that time in all the means of grace His mantle has fallen upon us, and the call to follow Him was very distinct and clear to us.

And not only in this way but in many others, He has called us all through life. In the peaceful quiet and ease, or in the dull monotonous work, of our daily lives, in the following of our laborious or of our profitable occupations, in the enjoyment of a life peaceful and innocent, yet so far perhaps selfish in that it looked not forward to anything much higher and better than quiet ease—He, our Elijah, passed by and cast His mantle

upon us. Something or other came to us from time to time, which we then felt to be, and even now feel and know was, a call from Him to follow Him in a life of higher aim, nobler purpose and more glorious destiny than anything we had hitherto thought of. Some word spoken by a friend it may have been, or a sentence read in a book ; some thought which suddenly struck us, and which has remained with us, and to which we are constantly brought back. The voice of the preacher or the voice of nature, the loss of some one near and dear to us, or the birth of a child ; some great joy, or some crushing sorrow ; something or other which brought life, duty, and destiny before us in a new and a higher light. And at the time we felt it to be a call to follow Christ, and we knew that the call brought with it a great responsibility. The word, the thought, or the event which conveyed the call may have been of the very simplest ; yet, simple as it was, it spoke its message to the soul, the conscience at once interpreted it, and we knew what it meant and from Whom it came.

The question for us now to ask ourselves is this : Did the will then and there accept the responsibility of vocation thus cast upon us ?

Well indeed for us if it did. But if not, even if we did then hesitate and hold back—even if then, fearing the difficulties and shrinking from the hardships, we did hold back from the self-sacrifice and cling to the old life—thank God, it is not yet too late. We may even yet, like Elisha, run after our Elijah. He is passing rapidly out of the field of our life, but He is not yet gone. There is yet time for us to run after Him and cry, ‘Let me, I pray Thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow Thee.’ And He will accept the service

thus offered, and as the answer comes back to us in the form of a question, 'Go back and do your duty in life, but in doing it follow Me, for what have I done to thee?' it will be to us a solemn injunction never to forget the great things that He hath done. 'Remember that I have called thee to follow Me. Remember that thy conscience has interpreted rightly the meaning of the call. Remember that thy will has accepted the call. Remember that I have called thee to follow Me in my suffering life of self-sacrifice: to take up the Cross; to deny thyself. Remember that I have called thee to a life of self-sacrifice, of warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil—a life the whole purpose of which will be to live in union with Me, sharing My hardships, My distress, My temptations, My persecutions, and My sufferings; but a life in which thou shalt also share in My love, My strength, and My counsel here, and in My glory hereafter. I have called thee to a life of self-denial, to a life of high aim, noble purpose, and glorious destiny; I have called thee to everlasting life and to eternal happiness.'

Ah, may God give us grace never to forget it!

We may yet take up our cross and follow Him; and our service, even though it be tardily offered, will be accepted and rewarded.

V.

*RESPONSIBILITY WITH REGARD TO THE
GRACE WHICH GOD OFFERS US.*

‘Ask what I shall do for thee.’—2 KINGS ii. 9.

WE have spoken of the first meeting which is recorded as having taken place between Elijah and Elisha, and of the first words which, so far as we know, they exchanged, and we have explained that it was a scene which brought both comfort into the life of the one and glory into the life of the other: comfort to Elijah, as he, fulfilling God’s command, drew to himself a faithful and loving companion and son; glory and blessing to Elisha, who, accepting the call and the responsibility attached to it, entered upon a life of the highest aim, the noblest purpose, and the most glorious destiny. And we have seen that this story of the call of Elisha is one which is repeated over and over again in our own lives. As Elijah, passing across the field of Abel-meholah, cast his mantle upon the shoulders of Elisha and thereby conveyed to him the call to follow him; so our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, passing across the field of human life, has cast upon us the mantle of His Incarnation, and called us to follow Him. Again and again has the call come to us, at our Baptism, in the Blessed

Sacraments and in many other ways. As Elisha's conscience interpreted the symbolical act of the Prophet, so has our conscience again and again interpreted the simple act whereby the call of Jesus Christ was conveyed. Elisha's will accepted the call and its responsibilities; and the question for us to ask ourselves is whether in this matter we have done as he did; and if we find that we have not, then our duty and our wisdom is, while there is yet time, to imitate him and run after Him Who has called us, and to offer Him the service which He is certain to accept and to reward, and to take up our cross and follow Christ. And now we pass on to the last earthly interview between Elijah and Elisha, for it too is also 'written for our learning,' and from it we will try to see the responsibility which rests upon us with regard to the grace which God in His infinite mercy offers to us.

It were difficult to find a more touching story than that of the last interview between Elijah and Elisha, and of the scene of their parting. Some ten years had passed by since they first met in the field of Abel-meholah, where Elisha was called from the plough to follow Elijah in his work for God, and for the nation. Those ten years had been years of varied and thrilling incident. For some seven years Ahab had continued his evil ways, unmoved alike by God's mercies and by His punishments. There had been the invasion of Israel by Benhadad, and a marvellous victory over the Syrians had been granted to Israel by God. Ahab, for the sake of temporal gain as he thought, had disobeyed God's command and had made a forbidden alliance with the king of Syria. He had coveted the vineyard of Naboth, and to robbery he had added murder. He had been rebuked

by Elijah, the best friend he ever had, but whom he, stirred up by Jezebel, looked upon and called 'his enemy.' The compact made with Syria had been broken, and then had followed the ill-fated alliance between Ahab and Jehoshaphat. Disregarding God's warning, they had gone to the battle of Ramoth Gilead, and in spite of the disguise and precautions of Ahab, the arrow of God's punishment had found him, and he had died the miserable death foretold by Elijah. To Ahab had succeeded Ahaziah his son, over whom Jezebel still exercised her evil influence; to him also Elijah had been sent in warning. Ahaziah had died and had been succeeded by his brother Jehoram; and still the evil went on, but we hear no more of Elijah's despondency. Grief there must have been and deep sorrow of heart; but duty was still performed up to the very end with splendid zeal and boldness. And then there comes the touching and beautiful story of the last scene of his earthly life, and of the parting of Elijah from Elisha, who throughout these ten years had been his constant and faithful attendant, disciple, friend, brother and son.

The time had now come when Elisha was to lose his master and guide, and when he was himself to succeed to Elijah's office and work. Together they leave Gilgal, which was probably the Gilgal in the hill country of Ephraim. Elijah, with no doubt clear, though mysterious knowledge of what was coming, first bade Elisha stay behind: 'Tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel.' He desired, doubtless, in his tenderness, to break the blow to his friend; but Elisha, ever faithful, loving, and true, refuses to leave him: 'As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave

thee.' And together they travelled down to Bethel. Here the sons of the prophets questioned Elisha: 'Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?' Yes, Elisha felt what was coming, he knew that the end was at hand; but it was a matter too sacred for discussion, his heart was so full that he could not bear to hear the question even mentioned, and he answered, 'Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.'

Elijah, having completed his mission at Bethel, again entreated Elisha to remain there and to go no further: 'Tarry here I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho.' But again there was the loving and faithful clinging to his master, and he answered with the same determination as before: 'As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.' And so they passed down together to Jericho. And here also the sons of the prophets gathered round Elisha and tried to force him into a discussion as to the approaching departure, as they, like their brethren of Bethel, said to him, 'Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?' But he refused to speak of it, and answered as before, 'Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.'

Yet a last time Elijah prayed his faithful follower to remain behind at Jericho: 'Tarry, I pray thee, here, for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan.' But again he refused. He would go with him to the end. Ten years before he had made up his mind, and he had never regretted the decision he then came to. Ten years before he had said, 'I will follow thee.' He would not turn back now. He could not leave him now. And once more he answered, 'As the Lord liveth, and as thy

soul liveth, I will not leave thee.' And so together they passed on across the strip of desert till they reached the Jordan. The Jordan reached, they stopped there for a moment. There was now no further appeal to Elisha to stay behind. They were there alone, the busy world had been left behind, together they will now go on to the end. 'And they two stood by Jordan.'

The river stopped their progress, but God makes a way for them that serve Him. 'And Elijah took his mantle'—the mantle of humility, the mantle of vocation, now the mantle of power—'and wrapped it together and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither; so they two went over on dry ground.' And when they had reached the other side they felt that the end was drawing near. The time had now come when the few moments that remained to them were felt to be so precious, that, in the deep anxiety that none of them should be wasted, the very power to say all that they desired to say to each other seemed to be lost.

We all know something of this kind of feeling, do we not? How, just before the parting, which we know is coming, there is so much to be said. We all know something of the anxiety that there is at such times to say all that we really wish to say, and how the necessity for brevity of speech, and the fear of leaving something unsaid, almost prevents our saying what we would. We all know something of the earnestness with which we say our last few words to the dear ones when the parting really comes, and the eagerness with which we listen to the last words spoken by them.

So, doubtless, it was with them, as 'they still went on and talked.' Earnestly and eagerly they communed

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together, and presently the loving heart of the elder prophet was filled with generous desire towards him whom he was about to leave; he would do something for him; he would leave him some token of his love, and so he said, 'Ask what I shall do for thee before I am taken away from thee.'

He desired to grant whatsoever Elisha should ask. How he must have hoped that Elisha would ask what was wise! And he spake as one who had not only the desire to grant but also the power to give. The fact that no limit was fixed to the petition, 'Ask what I shall do for thee before I am taken away from thee,' increased the responsibility on the part of Elisha to ask wisely, prudently, and well.

Elisha at once recognised the responsibility; his answer was ready. Probably he had long been thinking about this matter; he had been longing to ask for what he knew he needed, and now the opportunity to do so was given him. He knew that he was to succeed to the work of his master; he trembled as he thought of the greatness, the difficulties, and the responsibilities of that work. There rose up before his mind all the magnificence of Elijah's character—his strong will, his marvellous enthusiasm, his wonderful courage, his persistent zeal, and his steadfast faithfulness—and his heart failed him as he thought of his own imperfections and of the work which he would have to carry on. 'Who is sufficient for these things?' Something like this had no doubt been the tenor of his thoughts, and so his answer was ready: 'I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.' It was for no selfish purpose that he asked this great gift, but for the better fulfilment of his mission. It was a wise choice, and the heart of the elder

prophet must indeed have been filled with thankfulness, at finding that his disciple had thus 'coveted earnestly the best gifts,' and that he had asked so wisely and so well ; and he answered, 'Thou hast asked a hard thing ; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee ; but if not, it shall not be so.' The request was granted, and granted gladly, but it was conditional.

And then very soon the end came ; and it came very suddenly at last, as the end always does come suddenly, no matter how long or how anxiously it may have been expected and looked for. Is it not so ? We have watched long and lovingly by the bedside of the dying friend ; we knew the end was near ; anxiously we have looked for it, expecting it every moment, and yet when the last breath was exhaled and the spirit was set free, it came upon us suddenly. Yes, the end is always sudden. And so it was in the case of the parting of these two friends : ' And it came to pass as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder ; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof ! And he saw him no more.'

And Elisha was left alone, alone to go back to fulfil the long, weary toil of the many years of the prophet's work, in the midst of a gainsaying and rebellious people.

But as he went back to fulfil his mission there came to him a new power for his work ; a power which had hitherto been unknown to him. The hard thing he had asked had been granted, the double portion of the spirit of Elijah had been given to him ; and as the sign and

token thereof he saw lying at his feet the mantle of the prophet which had fallen from him ; the mantle in which Elijah had wrapped his face on Mount Horeb ; the mantle, the symbolical casting of which upon Elisha had conveyed the call to him in the field of Abel-meholah ; this mantle was now left to him as the badge of his calling, the symbol of his mission. The mantle of humility and the mantle of vocation was now become to him the mantle of power.

Elisha stooped down and took it to him, and then 'he went back and stood by the bank of Jordan,' and he immediately made use of the new power that had been given to him. 'He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah ? And when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither : and Elisha went over.' And in the power that had been given to him he went forward to his work.

Now there are some points in this story which call for further consideration.

First, we notice that Elisha was told to ask : 'Ask what I shall do for thee.' And the offer made to him was practically unlimited ; he was allowed to ask for whatever he desired, and he wisely asked for what he most needed, viz., the power wherewith to do his work, the grace of God, a double portion of the spirit that had rested on Elijah : the choice was the right one for him to have made. It was the same, long years before, in the case of Solomon. When he was quite a young man Solomon was called to succeed his father ; he had before him the great work of ruling the nation and of building the Temple. In the vision of the night, God came to him and said : 'Ask what I shall give thee.' He was

told to ask, no limit was placed to his petition. He recognised the responsibility involved in making his choice. He had already realised the greatness and the difficulties of the work to which he was called. His answer was ready, and he asked for wisdom, not from any merely selfish motive, but that he might the better discharge the duties of his calling ; and so answered, ' Give me, now, wisdom and knowledge that I may go out and come in before this people ; for who can judge this Thy people, that is so great ? ' It was a wise choice, and it was pleasing to God, because he asked for that which he needed in order to do, as it ought to be done, the daily work that God had given him to do—and that which he asked for was given him, and to it there were added those blessings which followed almost as its natural accompaniments.

So it was with Elisha ; his choice was the right choice, and that which he had asked for was given to him.

We notice, then, in the first place, that Elisha recognised his responsibility to ask for grace ; in the second place, we notice that the grace thus asked for was given to him ; and lastly we notice that, having received the gift, he recognised the responsibility that rested upon him as to its use. He used it, and he used it at once, to overcome the very first difficulty that met him in his path of duty. The Jordan flowed between him and the field of his future labours. Here was his first difficulty : he had to cross the Jordan. And he at once used the power given him to overcome this difficulty ; and by that faithful use of the power given to him, the waters parted hither and thither, and he passed over safely to his work.

The whole scene is a type and figure of a far higher

and greater mystery. It is impossible to dwell upon it without seeing that it foreshadowed the passing of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ through the River of Death ; His resurrection as He stood in His risen humanity on the other side of the River of Death ; His last words to His disciples during the great forty days ; the ascension of the risen Christ into Heaven ; the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church on the day of Pentecost ; and the subsequent action of the Church of Christ, as, filled with the power of the Holy Ghost, she went forth with zeal, in faith, and in power, to do her appointed work in the world.

But let us try to bring the matter more closely home to ourselves individually.

What is true in this matter of the Church of Christ, in her corporate capacity, is also true of each of her members.

We have each of us received our call from God. The mantle of the Incarnation—that mantle of humility in which the Eternal Son of God, for a while, veiled the glory of His Godhead—has become to each one of us the mantle of vocation.

The Blessed Sacraments are the extension of the Incarnation ; they are the garment, the mantle of the Holy One, spread within our reach—that touching them we may in faith touch Him, and be healed as was the woman of old.

One by one we have in Holy Baptism been made members of Christ, the Incarnate God, and we have received our call ; but there is more than this : this mantle of vocation is placed within our reach, to be to each one of us also the mantle of power. The grace we need in order to do our work and to be true to our vocation is

offered to us all, and offered freely ; but we must ask for it.

‘ Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you,’ says our blessed Lord. His boundless charity places no limit to our asking, even as His infinite power knows no limit of granting.

After all that has been done for us, there still remains the exercise of our own free will. God does not destroy that. Liberty is left to us.

The call has been given, but we are left free to accept it, or not, as Elisha was.

Grace is offered to us, but we are left free to seek it and to use it, or not, as we will, as Elisha was left free to take up the mantle and to use the power, or not to use it.

The invitation, ‘ Ask what I shall do for thee,’ is proposed to us ; but we are left free to ask, or not, as we will, as Elisha was left free to ask, or not to ask.

We see, then, the responsibility resting upon us as to grace, do we not ?

First, there is the responsibility as to the asking and seeking and knocking, and next there is the responsibility as to using grace when it has been given.

Let us then pray for grace and let us pray for it wisely. What we need is that grace that shall enable us to discharge, as they ought to be discharged, the duties of daily life, whatever they may be : that all may be done by us as God would have it done.

No two lives are exactly alike. No two persons have exactly the same duties to fulfil ; however much they may resemble each other so far as outward appearances go, there are always differences of detail.

But each knows his own special needs ; each knows the grace he specially wants ; each knows the sorrows

of his own heart ; each knows the besetting sin of his life ; each knows the prominent temptations ; each does really know the grace specially needed. Let him pray for that. Let us seek it in prayer, and it will be given to us. Elisha stooped down to take the mantle of power that fell from Elijah. It is on our knees that we must seek to take to us the mantle of power that God gives.

Let us also learn the further lesson which Elisha's example teaches us : the lesson as to the responsibility of using the grace given.

He used his newly-given power at once to overcome the first difficulty. The River Jordan, which flowed between him and the field of his duty, had to be passed ; he passed it by using the power given, and using it in prayer : 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah ?' he cried as he smote the waters.

So it must be with our use of grace : it must be used prayerfully. There must be the calling upon God to assist us with His grace and in its use.

One more lesson the story teaches, and it is this :

Jordan passed, by the use of the power given, did but open out for Elisha new opportunities for the exercise of the power given to him against a long series of other difficulties.

And so will it be with us in the faithful use of grace. We must use the grace given prayerfully, and we must use it against the first difficulty that meets us ; but we must remember that the first difficulty overcome will but open out the way to meeting with others. That first difficulty successfully passed, all will not be done. One after another difficulties will arise, and as each is by grace removed, it will but open the passage to new duty and fresh effort, till at last that river will be reached,

standing on the brink of which the very best, the most loyal and the truest heart, may well shrink back with awe and dread ; but even that river, the River of Death, by grace faithfully used shall part hither and thither, and though 'its waters rage and swell' and threaten to overwhelm us, yet, by God's help and mercy, we shall pass through unharmed into the land of our inheritance.

And now, to sum up in a few words what we have been saying on the question of our responsibility, let us try to bear in mind these questions and so far as possible their meaning and application :

'Where art thou ?' There is a burden of responsibility resting upon us as to our personal acts which each of us must bear for himself ; without help, it would crush us, but, casting it at the foot of the Cross of Christ, He will sustain us in the bearing thereof.

'Where is thy brother ?' Let us be true in our recognition of social responsibility, remembering that 'we are all one body in Christ.'

'What doest thou here ?' Let us recognise that responsibility with regard to our work lasts as long as God gives us work to do ; but that it extends only to the faithful discharge of duty.

'What have I done to thee ?' Let us strive more and more to realise our calling and to 'make that calling and election sure.'

'Ask what I shall do for thee ?' Let us seek grace, and use it.

V.

**A Scriptural Example of the
Spiritual Life.**

- I. THE VOCATION AND THE GIFT.
- II. THE DESIRE, AND THE PREPARATION, FOR GOD'S PRESENCE.
- III. THE ACCEPTANCE OF SUFFERING A FRUIT OF REPENTANCE.
- IV. THE TRUE PRINCIPLE OF OFFERING.
- V. THE DEATH OF THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART.

I.

THE VOCATION AND THE GIFT.

‘The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.’

I SAMUEL xvi. 13.

A CONSIDERATION of the life of the ‘man after God’s own heart’ can hardly fail of being useful to us in our efforts to live the spiritual life. The sweet Psalmist of Israel has left us words in which the Saints, in all ages, have ever expressed their deepest repentance, their most fervent prayers, their most loyal devotion, their highest hopes, their fullest gratitude, and their most joyful praise ; and not only they, but we also all our lives through have found no words more helpful than his in which to draw near to God. And surely it cannot but be both interesting and useful to review the story of one with whose words we have been so familiar, and who has thus had so great an influence over our lives. We propose then to speak of some of the scenes in David’s life, as setting forth some points and lines of action in the spiritual life.

The scene with which his history opens is one of the most striking character.

Saul, after repeated disobedience to God’s command, had been finally rejected, and the throne was to pass

from his family ; and after a while Samuel was sent by God to select, and to anoint, a successor to the throne of Israel, from among the sons of Jesse the Bethlehemite.

Samuel came therefore to Bethlehem, bringing from God a call to a magnificent though difficult work : the work of ruling God's people. The call to this great work was accompanied by the promise of a splendid and illustrious future, and by the offer of a glorious crown. It were impossible to conceive of a mission of greater importance, either to the nation or to the individual who should be chosen, than that with which Samuel was thus charged. And to him the sense of its importance must have been enhanced by the fact that he had already been the instrument through whom Saul had previously been chosen and anointed. His loyalty to the now fallen and disgraced monarch had been of the noblest. His best advice had been placed at his service ; his firm rebukes had been fearlessly administered ; and his earnest prayer had been offered for him and for his work. The defection of the king whom he so truly and deeply loved, and from whom he hoped so much good to the nation, had grieved him to the heart. Step by step he had seen Saul advancing, in spite of every warning and of every rebuke, towards his ruin. His magnificent gifts, his splendid opportunities, had been wasted and thrown away ; the blessings with which God had surrounded the opening years of his reign had been misused ; and disobedience had been persisted in, till at last Samuel was compelled to leave him and to separate himself entirely from one who had so deliberately departed from God ; and then the prophet had spent his days in mourning over this sad loss of vocation on the part of Saul to whom he had been so faithful.

After a while 'the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill thine horn with oil, and go; I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite; for I have provided me a king among his sons.'

And so Samuel, intensely impressed by the importance of his mission, came to Bethlehem. It would be indeed difficult to conceive of a scene more solemn and impressive than that which followed.

Arrived at his destination, Samuel first declared that he came peaceably: 'I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord.' 'And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.' The presence and the blessing of the Almighty having been thus solemnly invoked, Samuel bids Jesse to cause his sons to pass before him. They came, and as he looked on Eliab he said, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him.' But the Lord said unto Samuel, 'Look not on his countenance, or the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.'

Ah! how the remembrance of Saul's magnificent stature, his noble presence, and then of his miserable failure, must have recurred for an instant to the prophet's mind!

Eliab rejected, Jesse made the rest of his sons to pass before Samuel, and one by one they were all seven rejected.

Samuel, somewhat surprised, then asked Jesse the question, 'Are here all thy children?' and the answer was, 'There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep.' He was but a mere lad, and it would seem that he had been somewhat overlooked; Jesse had probably thought it hardly worth while that

he should be presented, thinking that it was out of the question that he should be selected for so great and important a work or for so high a dignity. The others, indeed, were grown men, and men of valour; they had already followed Saul, and had some experience of warfare and of camps; but the youngest was but a mere lad, 'behold he keepeth the sheep.'

It was a mistaken view to take, true; but if even Samuel, when he looked on Eliab, said, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him,' and had to learn the lesson that God does not judge as man does, we can hardly be surprised that Jesse should have had to learn the same lesson too.

So Samuel said unto Jesse, 'Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he come hither.' Thus David was 'taken from the sheepfolds,' and they 'brought him in.'

Samuel, as he looked for the first time upon the youth, 'ruddy and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to,' yet a mere stripling, must again have had his thoughts for a moment carried back to the time when he had first looked upon Saul, whom he had also anointed to be king—that man, blessed of God with such splendid gifts, standing from the shoulders upwards above his fellows, so manifestly marked out both by his physical as well as by his other gifts to be a leader of men. The contrast between the two must have struck the prophet as very great and marked.

But still he knew that this was God's choice, and he also knew full well that the shepherd lad, obedient to God's commands, and by the help of God's grace, would accomplish far more than all human power with the most perfect human qualifications could do, apart from obedience and without grace.

This was he then whom God had chosen, and the divine message came to the prophet, 'Arise, anoint him : for this is he.'

'Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren : ' and it is added, 'the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.'

We notice then here, in the first place, that with the vocation there was also given the gift whereby to fulfil it.

God, Who called David to a great work, with its vast difficulties and responsibilities, gave him also the power whereby to do that work, to overcome those difficulties, and to discharge those responsibilities.

God, Who promised him the glorious destiny and the illustrious future attaching to that work, also gave him the grace whereby to fulfil that destiny and to attain to that future.

God, Who offered him the royal crown, also gave him the opportunity and all else that was needed, in order that he might win and wear it.

All this is implied by the statement that 'the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.' With the vocation there was also the gift.

We have to notice, in the next place, that David realised the fact that he had received the gift of 'the Spirit of the Lord.' And this is a matter that deserves special attention, for that realisation of the gift formed in David a fixed and steady basis of action. David's words, no less than his actions, all prove throughout his after life that he knew that the Spirit of the Lord rested upon him. He says, 'I laid me down and slept, and rose up again ; for the Lord sustained me,' 'The Lord Himself is the portion of mine inheritance.' He speaks of God as 'my Defender,' 'my Worship,' 'the Lifter up

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of my head,' 'my Defence,' 'my Health,' 'my Glory.' He declares that 'the Lord was my Upholder,' 'Thou art my Helper and my Redeemer,' 'the king shall rejoice in Thy strength, O Lord,' 'the Lord is my Shepherd,' 'the Lord is my Strength and my Shield,' 'the Lord is my Light and my Salvation,' 'it is God that girdeth me with strength of war,' 'I will go forth in the strength of the Lord,' 'my help cometh of God.' Ah, yes! 'the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward'—and David knew it; he fully realised it.

The sense of God's presence, of God's protection, and of God's help, is to be found throughout his utterances; the certainty that he had the Spirit of the Lord resting upon him marks the whole of his after life. Even when, in the days of his later prosperity, he for a moment lost sight of this great truth, and thereby fell into sin, it was but for a moment, and then the returning sense of the truth which he had forgotten moved him to quick and true repentance.

Then again we go on to notice this, that the one thing which, above all others, David feared to lose was the Spirit of God, the presence of the Almighty. He knew that without God he was never safe, and so we find him constantly praying in this spirit: 'Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.' 'O take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.' 'Go not far from me, O Lord my God, haste Thee to help me.' 'Hide not Thy face from Thy servant.' 'Go not far from me, for trouble is hard at hand.' 'Forsake me not, O Lord my God; be not far from me.' 'Cast me not away in the time of age; forsake me not when my strength faileth me.' 'Hide not Thy face from me, nor cast Thy servant away in displeasure.'

And yet again there is this also to be noticed, that David not only realised the fact that he had the gift of God's Holy Spirit, and that the Spirit of the Lord did rest upon him ; not only did he fear above all things to lose it, but he also gave himself to follow the guidance of God's Holy Spirit : He was continually praying that God would lead him and direct him, and guide him ; and his prayers ever reveal his desire and firm purpose to follow the direction given, 'Thou shalt shew me the path of life,' 'Lighten mine eyes,' 'Shew me Thy ways, O Lord, and teach me thy paths,' 'Lead me forth in Thy truth, and learn me,' 'Teach me Thy way, O Lord, and lead me in the right way,' 'O let me have understanding in the way of godliness,' 'Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth Thee, for Thou art my God,' 'Let Thy loving Spirit lead me forth into the land of righteousness.'

But there is yet to be observed something more than this : David realised that he had the gift of God's Holy Spirit, he feared above all things to lose it, and he gave himself to its guidance. But beyond this he realised that God's grace was given to him for a purpose, and that purpose was that he should use it ; and he did use it and in the use of the grace given to him he was constantly, either consciously or unconsciously, fitting himself for the work to which he should be called and the duties he would have to perform in later life. Loyalty to duty was one of the special characteristics of David's life, and in that loyalty to duty lay the foundation of his heroism. This is to be noticed in many ways throughout his history. First, having been anointed with oil in the midst of his brethren, he went back again to his work as a shepherd lad, and in that work he was loyal to duty. In the use of the strength now given him his youthful courage grew,

and he slew the lion and the bear in defence of his flock ; as he himself afterwards said, under the protection and in the strength of God ; and he was thus laying the foundation of that personal courage and bravery which afterwards shewed themselves in the brave warrior.

In the leisure time which his occupation as a shepherd on the hills of Bethlehem left to him, he used the grace of God in discharging that duty which every young man owes to himself—the duty of self-culture ; he made the best use he possibly could of the opportunities afforded him.

He developed the taste which God had given him for music ; at first the hillside, no doubt, often resounded with discords and re-echoed false notes ; but steady perseverance at last resulted in his becoming the ‘cunning player,’ and this led up to his first introduction to Saul’s court. And, moreover, he was then preparing himself, quite unconsciously no doubt, but still none the less really, for the work of setting in order the worship of God later on.

In the beauties and marvels of nature, which surrounded him on all sides, he found a field for observation and study. Never was there a more careful, diligent, or loving student of nature than was David ; and in it all he ever saw God and the working of God’s hand. To him the trees were the trees of the Lord, the dew was His blessing, the clouds were His chariot, and the thunder His voice. To him the earth was ever full of the goodness of the Lord. And this sense of God’s presence ever increased both the interest and the love with which his observations were made. Probably at the time he little thought of the value which his observation and study, and all the knowledge which he was thus acquiring, would afterwards be to him, or of the glorious

purpose which they were destined to serve in the preparation of the plans of the Temple, wherein all the beauties of nature, in leaf, flower, and fruit, were to be reproduced to beautify the sanctuary of the Most High.

And it was not only in these more youthful days that he thus used the grace of God. As time went on he used it constantly in the effort to be loyal to duty, as duty came before him from day to day ; as in the early days he had been loyal to duty as a shepherd lad, though anointed to be king, so he remained loyal to duty as his position in life changed.

Faithful and true, knowing that God was with him, he went fearlessly against Goliath of Gath, as he had gone against the lion and the bear.

Persecuted by Saul, and hunted by him 'as a partridge in the mountains,' he remained ever loyal to his master and king. Again and again, when Saul was in his power, and he might have slain him, he stayed his hand ; he resisted the temptation, great as it must have been ; he would not touch the Lord's anointed, though he had been anointed to succeed him ; he would not snatch at the crown, though he knew that it was to be his. He would wait God's time, and he was loyal to duty through the use of grace.

Later on again, when he came to the throne, and when all the real, serious, and difficult work of his life began, he still faithfully used the gift that had been given to him. As king he was still loyal to his duty, both to God and to man. He proved himself to be the brave warrior, the watchful protector, and the wise and diligent ruler of his people, for he 'fed them with a faithful and true heart ; and ruled them prudently with all his power.' His earlier training then found its fuller develop-

ment and exercise, as by God's grace he used the knowledge and skill which he had then acquired in beautifying the worship of God with songs of praise, and in adorning with his skill the plans for the building of that Temple in which God's worship was eventually to be carried on, and which was to be the glory of the whole earth.

We notice then, so far, in the story of David's life that together with the vocation God gave him the gift of His Holy Spirit ; that David realised to the full the fact that he had received the gift as well as the calling ; that he feared above all things the loss of this gift ; that he yielded himself up entirely to the guidance of God ; and that he used the gift that had been given him.

And now, surely, it will not be difficult for us to apply this part of the history to ourselves.

God has sent His Church, as He sent Samuel in the days of old, not indeed now to choose one out of many, but to offer to all just those same three things which Samuel was sent to offer to David.

First, a vocation ; the call is to a great and difficult work, one exactly corresponding to that to which David was called, viz., the work of ruling. We are called to rule all that little world within us—of thought, understanding, desires and affections, passions and appetites ; and we are to rule them for God. We are to 'glorify God in our body and in our mind, which are God's.' That is the work to which we are called. And the work is one which is full of difficulty. It is a work of re-organisation and of reconstruction. There are within us many rebellious and disobedient subjects and all these have to be reduced to order and obedience. The work is great and difficult.

In the next place there is offered to us a glorious destiny ; we are called to be kings ; to reign with Christ.

And there is also the promise of a crown of everlasting life, which is laid up in store for everyone that is faithful and true, penitent and obedient.

But, though called to be kings, and though promised the crown, there is to be the long struggle and the patient waiting, ere the kingdom be won and the crown worn. In order that we may maintain that struggle, carry on that warfare, and patiently endure that waiting, grace has been given to us.

Not only has the call been given, and the offer and promise made, but we have also received the gift, the grace whereby to do the work, fulfil the destiny, and win and wear the crown. Together with the vocation there has been given to us the gift.

We too, like David, have been anointed in the midst of our brethren when we were baptized into the Church of God, and 'the Spirit of the Lord came upon us from that day forward.'

Our first duty is to realise, as David did, that we have the gift ; very many of our failures may be traced to our forgetting this. 'I have the gift of God's Holy Spirit,' that is the thought that should always be present in the mind ; if it were so, that other thought which so constantly suggests itself, and to which we are so continually tempted to give way, viz. 'I cannot do as I ought, I cannot do this or that,' would at once be checked.

And then, remembering that the Holy Spirit has been given to us, that we have the gift of grace, let us, as David did, ever fear above all things to lose the gift. 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.' 'Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.' Let that ever

be our prayer. And, if this be really our prayer, we shall then, like David, always give ourselves up to follow the guiding and leading of God's Holy Spirit ; and that will keep us in safety.

Then too, like David, we must use the grace that is given to us that we may respond loyally to the calls of duty as they come to us from day to day. We too, like him, have to go back after our call to our ordinary daily occupations—for the most part our lives have to be spent in all the monotony of daily toil and duty. Life has to be lived in the midst of very much which, at first sight, seems to have little or nothing to do with the dignity of our calling or of our destiny ; the ordinary duties of life seem to have as little relation to the crown of glory as the shepherd's crook had to the royal sceptre. True, but it was the faithful use of the shepherd's crook that fitted the hand to wield the royal sceptre. And the faithful discharge of duty, no matter how commonplace that duty may be, is that which prepares the brow to wear the crown ; and it is in reality just in the being ever loyal to duty that the soul is prepared for the great future which lies before it.

Let us remember that what is 'grace' here will become 'glory' hereafter ; and that it is, therefore, the use of grace here that fits the soul to be endowed with glory hereafter.

What a marvellous example is David to all the young ! By the use of grace in youth preparing himself for the greater duties which God had in store for him in later life. After having been anointed as the future king he went back quietly and contentedly to his appointed work ; and he did that work with his whole heart, faithfully and diligently. There was no murmuring at the monotony of

his life. There was no discontent with his present lot in life. There was no complaining that God's promise was not immediately fulfilled. There was no neglect of his present work because it seemed to have nothing to do with his future calling. No neglect of the sheep because he was to be king. There was no wasting of his time in idle dreaming, but he made the very best use of all his opportunities. His whole character was marked by patience and perseverance. He cultivated his gifts ; he did not become 'cunning in playing' his harp without long and tedious practice ; all that knowledge of nature which he acquired was not obtained without much intelligent observation and very careful investigation. There is no royal road to excellence in anything. And all this self-culture was carried on by him without any neglect of the ordinary duties of his daily life ; and without any boasting or ostentatious display. A grand character he became by the use of God's grace : 'Cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him.' What an example he is to us all ! This life being our training time for eternity, the use of grace in the present life is the preparation for the dignity of the future life.

II.

*THE DESIRE AND THE PREPARATION FOR
GOD'S PRESENCE.*

‘O let me have understanding in the way of godliness.—PSALM ci. 2
(Prayer-Book Version).

SOME twenty years have now passed by since the scene at Bethlehem of which we were last speaking, when Samuel had been sent by God to choose and to anoint, from among the sons of Jesse, a king who should succeed to the throne of Israel after the death of Saul. David had then been chosen, and having been anointed with oil in the midst of his brethren, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him from that day forward.

Throughout these long twenty years his life had been one of varied and thrilling incident.

To the quiet and monotonous period of his life, spent as a shepherd on the hills of Bethlehem, had succeeded the difficulties and the dangers of life at Saul's court. Then had followed the long period of trial and distress, during which he had been persecuted by Saul; and, lastly, the disturbed period of the early part of his reign at Hebron. But throughout it all, by the use of God's grace, David had remained loyal to his duty. And now the time had come when the serious work of his life was about to begin.

It was now some years since the death of Saul. David had put down the insurrection and the opposition which had marked the opening of his reign. He had taken Jerusalem, and had fixed upon it as henceforth the capital of the kingdom. He had reigned for seven years and a half at Hebron, and had removed to Jerusalem ; and, now that he was settled there, he found himself face to face with the great work of his life, with all its difficulties and its immense responsibilities.

Hitherto David all through his life had recognised the fact that God was with him, and had feared to lose God's presence. He had continually experienced the blessing of this protection, and he had striven to give himself to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to use the grace God gave him. And now that God's promise had been thus far fulfilled, and he was firmly seated upon the throne, as all the importance of his work came more than ever home to him, and as all the intricacies and difficulties of that work opened out before him, he felt, perhaps more strongly than he ever yet had done, the need of grace, and that it was only in the faithful use of it that he could fulfil his duty.

He took counsel with himself, and then he spake to God, and in the 101st Psalm he declared his life's purpose. First he declared the spirit in which his work should be carried on. Then there was the prayer asking for the help he would need. And lastly he mapped out, so to speak, his line of action in the future.

The Psalm opens with a declaration as to the spirit that shall characterise his work : 'My song shall be of mercy and judgment ; unto thee, O Lord, will I sing.' Here he strikes, as it were, the keynote of the principles upon which he will endeavour to act. He was called to

rule God's people. 'Mercy and judgment' shall mark his rule; and it shall all be done as in the presence of the Almighty: 'Unto thee, O Lord, will I sing.' If he is to do this he will need the help of God, and so he prays: 'O let me have understanding in the way of godliness.' Then he goes on to express his heart's desire, the deep longing he had for God's presence, and the tokens of God's presence with him. He knew that God was with him, but he also desired to have the symbol of that presence with him in Jerusalem, in the capital of his kingdom, in the very heart as it were of the nation. The desire for God's presence quickened in him the desire for tokens of that presence, everything that would constantly remind him of it was a help to him. And that is always so, is it not? The heart that really loves God, the soul that finds its help and its rest in God, is ever yearning for evidences, symbols, tokens, of that blessed presence. Everything that will remind the soul of that presence is a help to devotion and a comfort in life.

This desire on David's part is to be found expressed in various ways throughout his life.

Now that he is settled in Jerusalem, his first thought is to have the Ark of God, the Ark of the Covenant, with him. This is doubtless the meaning of the words, 'When wilt Thou come unto me?' Then all through life he was longing to build the Temple, wherein to place that Ark as in its final resting place; all through life he was ever making preparation for that building; and though told that it was not God's will that he should build it, but that Solomon his son should do so, he was nevertheless permitted to go on making provision for it, and preparing the plans from which it should be

built. This he did, and with his last words he gave directions as to, and urged diligence in, the carrying out of this wish of his heart.

There is something exceedingly noble and at the same time very touching in this great desire for God's glory thus fastening itself upon one particular and definite point, and lasting all through the long life up to the very end ; and, that, even when there was the certainty of never in life seeing its realisation.

'When wilt Thou come unto me?' that is, When shall I have the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence, here with me in Jerusalem, in my home ?

The Ark of the Covenant was a chest made of wood, overlaid with gold. It had been made long centuries before by Bezaleel at the direction of Moses, by the command of God. The top thereof, overshadowed by the wings of the two cherubim of gold, one of which was placed at either end, was 'the mercy seat,' where the manifestation of God's presence was mysteriously vouchsafed.

It was first made to contain the two tables of stone upon which were written, by the finger of God, the Ten Commandments ; and with these tables of stone there were afterwards placed, by God's direction, the rod of Aaron that had budded, and the pot of Manna.

Now it is well that we should notice here what it was that these three things typified and spake of.

First, the tables of stone : here was the Law of God, His Commandments—the expression of the mind of God the Creator on the subject of the duty of his creature man, His beneficent rules for the right use of His gifts. Then there was the rod of Aaron : here was the symbol of the divinely-appointed priesthood. And in the last

place there was the pot of Manna: here was the miraculous food, whereby the children of Israel had been sustained in the wilderness—the type of supernatural grace.

The history of the Ark also calls for a few moments' consideration before we go on with the story. It had led the people in their journeyings in the wilderness. It had stayed the waters of Jordan and caused them to stand 'on a heap,' so soon as the feet of the priests that bare it touched them, till all the people had passed over dry-shod; it had led the nation to conquest; it had been lost for a while, when taken by the Philistines in the time of Eli, and when regained it had been placed in the house of Abinadab, where it remained for the greater part of a century, till David fetched it away to bring it up to Jerusalem.

It was the Ark of the Covenant which the king desired to have with him, now that the seat of government was fixed at Jerusalem; that is to say, he would have with him the symbol of God's declared Law, God's authorised priesthood, and God's continual grace, and thus assisted he would 'walk in his house with a perfect heart.'

Next we go on to notice the wise way in which the man after God's own heart proceeds in this Psalm to lay down the lines upon which he will endeavour to carry out his work in the reformation of the kingdom over which he had been called to rule.

The work was one of the utmost difficulty. In the first place it must be remembered that the nation had become most terribly disorganised during the later years of Saul's reign; the wilfulness and disobedience of the king to the commands of God had resulted in his own loss of power as a ruler, and had brought about dis-

content among the people, as well as loss and disaster to the nation ; the work of reformation and reconstruction was an exceedingly difficult one, and David knew that to do it effectually he must begin with himself.

As Saul's disobedience, wilfulness, and departure from God had brought about disorder, so David determined that his own example should give the tone to a new and better state of things.

Here therefore are some of the resolutions he made with regard to himself and his own personal life :

'I will walk in my house with a perfect heart.' Sincerity of purpose should be so stamped on all that he did, that all men should see and feel that his life was the outcome of a sincere intention and desire to do right.

'I will take no wicked thing in hand.' He determines to have no part in any deliberate breach of God's law.

'I hate the sins of unfaithfulness ; there shall no such cleave unto me.'

What did he mean by these sins of unfaithfulness ? We think that he, of all men most loyal to duty, meant by sins of unfaithfulness any neglect of duty, whether to God or man. Unfaithfulness to God : lack of faith and trust, neglect of prayer, carelessness as to worship, disobedience to law. Unfaithfulness to man : deceit, dishonesty, injustice, wilful failure in the discharge of duty.

'There shall no such cleave unto me.' He would have nothing whatever to do with such things. Ah, what a grand, loyal heart was his !

Next he goes on to the question of the reformation of his household, and the formation of that inner circle of friends and counsellors with whom he must of neces-

sity be the most closely connected. Those to whom he would have to look for the carrying out of his directions in the government of the nation : how should he choose these, and what should be the principle upon which his selection should be made ? His task in this matter was surrounded by immense difficulties ; few men, perhaps, have ever had greater difficulties of the same kind.

There was, indeed, no lack of men to choose from ; and as there were many men from among whom to choose, so also were there many conflicting interests to embarrass his choice.

There were many who may have been still to a certain extent adherents of the house of Saul, whose goodwill he was, perhaps, expected to propitiate. There were those who had transferred their allegiance from the house of Saul to him during the progress of the 'long war between the house of Saul and the house of David,' whilst he had reigned in Hebron, and whilst gradually 'David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.' All these would certainly expect their claims to promotion to be recognised. But he had yet greater difficulties to contend with than these.

The loyal heart of David, so generous and so grateful, and withal so true and tender, must have been sorely tried as he thought of all the long list of those who, in the days of his adversity and of his persecution, had come to join him, and to throw in their lot with him, when he was in the Cave of Adullam.

Here it was, perhaps, that the special trial would have to come to his gentle, generous, grateful, and loyal heart. These men had shared his poverty and distress, they had shared his persecution and his danger,

they had fled and wandered with him in the mountains, they had hidden with him in the caves, and joined him in his daring exploits. Could they be forgotten or put on one side? Could their claims be ignored now that he had arrived at power and greatness?

All kinds of persons had come to him there. 'His brethren and all his father's house, and everyone that was in distress, and everyone that was in debt, and everyone that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them.'

And now that he was king, now that he was firmly seated upon the throne, now that he had arrived at power and greatness, they would certainly, many of them at any rate, be expecting some mark of favour.

Amongst them there were indeed grand and noble spirits; and many others of them, no doubt, having passed through the fire of affliction, and having come into contact with the brave and loyal life of David, had been refined, raised, and ennobled in character. There were amongst them many brave, noble, and brilliant characters. There were Adino, Eleazar, and Shammah, with their magnificent bravery, their intensely tender devotion, and their splendid heroism. There was Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, with his prudent watchfulness, and his firm and steady loyalty; there were many whose names came only second to these, as renowned for deeds of valour and loyalty. And had all been like them, then the difficulty might not have been great. But there were others also. There were those of his own kindred. There were the sons of his sister Zeruiah, with their reckless impetuosity, who were always bringing about troubles, and of whom he had, later on, to say that they were 'too hard for him.' There were those

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who had remained distressed and were still discontented. All would be looking to David now and would be expecting posts of honour or of profit.

All these difficulties, as they presented themselves to David's mind, called for prompt and vigorous action.

The man after God's own heart then lays down in this Psalm the principle upon which he would select, from among all these men, his immediate friends and advisers. The principle was the only sound and right one. In all humility he remembered that he himself had been selected by God, 'who seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance; but the Lord looketh on the heart,' and he would do his best to choose as God chose.

Bravery and strength and brilliancy of powers should have their place in the considerations which should determine his choice; but he would not select men for these things alone, he would, in the first place, look for truth and honesty, uprightness, humility, and godliness.

Now let us see the rules he laid down for himself, both as regards rejection and selection.

'A froward heart shall depart from me; I will not know a wicked person.'

'Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour; him will I destroy.'

'Whoso hath also a proud look and high stomach; I will not suffer him.'

'There shall no deceitful person dwell in my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.'

These are the kind of men whom he will reject altogether; no bravery, no courage or brilliancy, can compensate for such evil defects as these. He will have nothing whatever to do with the froward, the

wicked, the slanderer, the proud, the deceitful, or the untruthful.

Now let us see whom it is that he will choose.

‘Mine eyes look upon such as are faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me.’

‘Whoso leadeth a godly life, he shall be my servant.’

These are the kind of men with whom he will surround himself—the faithful and the godly.

And thus reforming his household, he will carry on his work of reformation throughout the whole kingdom, until he shall have destroyed ‘all the ungodly that are in the land,’ and rooted out ‘all wicked doers from the city of the Lord.’

What a splendid lesson does David thus teach us all as to the spiritual life! What an example His is for the young to follow—those who are about to establish themselves in life and to form their households! Very much, indeed, of the success of the after life depends on making a good beginning. And there are few things of greater importance than the principle upon which the household is first formed. Many and many a life of wrecked happiness may be traced to a mistaken beginning in this respect.

David here gives the true rules for the beginning of a godly, and therefore successful, life.

First, ‘mercy and judgment’ are to rule the conduct of the head of the house. If the household is to be what it should be, the head of the family must begin with himself. Then there must be the constant prayer for ‘understanding in the way of godliness.’ Then there must be the desire to have God’s presence in the home. ‘When wilt Thou come unto me?’ That which was symbolised by the Ark of God must be there : viz., the Church of God

of which that Ark was so remarkably a type. Let us recall for a moment what it contained : the tables of stone, the law of God ; the rod of Aaron, the symbol of the priesthood ; the pot of Manna, the miraculous food : these were what it contained all the while that it led the Israelites in their wanderings in the wilderness, as it led them through Jordan, and went before them to conquest. But when it was placed by Solomon in the Temple, as in its final resting-place, we are told that there was in it nothing save the two tables of stone. Here we have a remarkable type of the Church. For so long as the Church of Christ is here on earth, leading us through the wilderness, and, through the waters of Holy Baptism, on to conquest over the devil, the world, and the flesh, so long will she have in her these three things, viz., the Law of God, the Priesthood, and the Sacraments. She will contain these as the greatest treasures committed to her safe keeping, since in and through them God's presence is vouchsafed. But, when she shall have reached her final resting-place in Heaven, there will be no longer any need of Priesthood, nor of Sacraments, but there will still be this one thing, God's Law, perfectly kept.

If we are to live our life in union with Jesus Christ ; if the tone of the household is to be what it ought to be ; if the spiritual life is to rule there, God must be recognised and worshipped ; His laws must be obeyed ; His grace must be sought ; His Sacraments must be used ; the Church of God must have a home in the house. ' Oh, when wilt Thou come unto me ? ' There must be this desire for God's presence, and we should never rest satisfied till we have it with us in the home.

Then in the next place there is the rule for the

personal life of the ruler in the house. Example is always better than precept.

‘I will walk in my house with a perfect heart.’ ‘I will take no wicked thing in hand. I hate the sins of unfaithfulness ; there shall no such cleave unto me.’

Here is the true principle upon which to act in establishing the home.

Then comes the question of the choice of the friends, and of the close companions of the life ; they should be such as are like-minded with the master of the house ; those who, like him, have this determination in their hearts : ‘I will walk in my house with a perfect heart. I will take no wicked thing in hand. I hate the sins of unfaithfulness ; there shall no such cleave unto me.’ David’s rule is again the only one which it is safe to follow, viz., to choose them not merely for brilliancy or natural gifts, but for the moral beauty of their characters. The truthful, the honest, the pure, the faithful, the devout and godly, they are the friends to choose.

Here are rules which, if followed at the outset of life, when the household is being first formed and established, will do much to secure its success and happiness, and, surely, even if in the past they have been neglected, it is not too late to observe them now in the work of reformation.

But further, we may apply David’s rules to the ordering of our own souls, to our individual lives, may we not ?

We have already said that, like David, each one of us is called to rule over a kingdom, even that little kingdom within us, in which there are very many rebellious subjects, and very much of anarchy and confusion.

Passions and appetites struggling for the mastery,

desires ever seeking to pass beyond bounds, affections constantly going astray, thoughts rebelling against control; and all this confusion has to be reduced to order and discipline.

Here David's rule applies.

First let us see that the conscience be obeyed, not argued with; let us do what conscience bids us do: let 'mercy and judgment' rule the personal life. Do right, as in the presence of God. Let there be a constant desire and longing for God's presence and all those things in and through which His presence is manifested. Then let our thoughts be carefully sifted and selected. Our thoughts are our closest companions, the friends or the foes most closely connected with the ruling of our whole nature. If they be carefully watched, sifted, and chosen, then our words and our deeds will also be largely controlled. If the thoughts be right, the ungodly words will soon be destroyed, and the wicked deeds 'rooted out from the city of the Lord.'

Let us choose and reject thoughts then by David's rule. All sorts of thoughts will be clamouring for admittance, for notice, for some place in our lives; as in the case of David's followers, so in ours. There will be the noble and the true, the brave and the chivalrous, the clever and the brilliant; and if all were like them the difficulty would not be so great; but alas! they are not, there are many others. There are the rash, headstrong, and impetuous thoughts, which, like the sons of Zeruiah, are always bringing about mischief and trouble. There are the vain and the foolish, the distressed and the discontented. Let us, following David's rule, have nothing to do with the froward or wicked, the slanderous or the proud, the deceitful or the untruthful thoughts,

but choose the faithful, the quiet, and the godly, that they may dwell with us. And dwelling with us they will help us day by day to bring about order and godliness in the little kingdom over which we have been called to rule.

We have, then, in David, an example which we shall do well to follow. He recognised the fact that he had the grace of God ; he feared, above all things, to lose it ; he gave himself up to the guidance of God's Holy Spirit ; and he used the grace that was given to him, and by its use was ever loyal to duty. He sought to have the token of God's presence with him ; he resolved that his own personal life should be godly, and that his example should be a good one ; and he chose his friends and companions well and wisely.

III.

*THE ACCEPTANCE OF SUFFERING A FRUIT
OF REPENTANCE.*

‘Behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him.’—
2 SAMUEL xv. 26.

WE have already said that the Bible, with its pitiless veracity, records not only the virtues but also the faults, failings, shortcomings, and the sins of the saints whose lives it speaks of; and the world at times makes use of this very fact in its warfare against the soul. Shimei has had many followers, has them now, and will have them still; there will always be those who will throw stones at David and at other saints whose faults are recorded, and who will say, ‘Look at the man after God’s own heart: a murderer and an adulterer, and yet he is held up as a pattern of life.’ Yes, but if David had been set before us as a perfect character without the least stain or blemish, the very same persons, expressing the spirit of the world, would have been the first to say: ‘The story is not true to life; a character such as this is something more than human.’

We may well thank God that the Bible does give us the records of the saints as they really were, and that it sets before us saintly men sustained by grace, and that it shows us how it was, and wherein it was, that they

failed : not through any insufficiency of grace, but because from time to time they either forgot to seek it or neglected to use it. Then too we may indeed thank God that we have recorded for us the story of David's repentance. There are perhaps few, if indeed there be any, records which have been more useful than this in leading men back to God.

We will try now to see from David's story how the submission to suffering in punishment is one of the fruits of true repentance.

David had fallen into a great and grievous sin ; for a little moment he had forgotten that which all through his life he had realised, viz., that the Spirit of the Lord rested upon him ; for the moment he had laid aside that fear of losing God's presence which had hitherto been one of the great safeguards of his life ; he had neglected to yield himself up to the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, and consequently he had neglected to use the grace given to him, and as the inevitable result of all this he had fallen into sin.

But Holy Scripture, which records his sin, also records his full and complete repentance, thus revealing in him the working and the result of grace. God had not forgotten him, though for the moment he had forgotten God. The Holy Spirit moved him to repentance ; the sense of sin came to him. The moment he realised it he was overwhelmed with sorrow ; and he at once confessed his sin : ' I have sinned against the Lord.' He urged no excuse, he did not try to escape from his responsibility in the matter. There was full and open admission of his guilt, as he said, ' I have sinned against the Lord.' But it did not stop here ; his repentance was full and complete. There was true amendment of

life as well as confession of the sin. So, too, was the forgiveness full and complete: 'The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.'

But though the forgiveness granted to him by God was complete, yet he had still to suffer for his sin. Punishment of some kind is of necessity one of the inevitable results of sin, even though the forgiveness be granted.

It was so in David's case; he was to suffer, and to suffer in many ways. His repentance was life-long; so too in a certain sense was his punishment, and the way in which he bore that punishment was part of that satisfaction which completed his repentance; it was an evidence of the reality and depth of his repentance. There was first the death of his child. He fasted and prayed for the child; but when the child died he accepted the will of God, and bowed before the will of Him who sent the punishment. Later on there came the deeper sorrow yet, still as punishment for his sin—the rebellion of Absalom, with all its sad consequences. There had been treachery and conspiracy on the part of Absalom. Gradually he had been drawing the hearts of the people from their allegiance to David. After a time the conspiracy, which had been for long constantly gathering fresh adherents, broke out into open rebellion. Absalom went to Hebron and there collected the discontented, and having raised an army, marched against Jerusalem.

David and his few faithful ones took to flight; and a sad procession indeed it was, as the king and his followers passed out of the city gate, across the brook Kidron, and up the Mount of Olives—mourning, barefoot, and weeping as they went, and as 'all the country wept

with a loud voice.' There is something very touching in their signs of sorrow, as well as in the devotion of the followers of the king in his humiliation.

'The six hundred men which came with him from Gath,' the flower of his army, passed on before him. Ittai refused to leave him : 'As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.'

Zadok the priest also would have followed him with the Ark of God—that which in his early days, before his sin, he had so longed to have with him. Now, though his longing for God's presence was no less earnest and deep than it had been in those early days, yet he felt himself unworthy of it ; he had by his sin made the separation between himself and God ; he would bear his punishment, in the hope of pardon. So 'the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city : if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and shew me both it and His habitation : but if He say thus, I have no delight in thee ; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him.'

We notice here the evidence of the deepest repentance, the submission to punishment in satisfaction for his sin ; he would try to bear, without resenting it, all that God saw fit to lay upon him.

The top of the hill past, another sorrow falls upon him. Ziba comes to him with the story of Mephibosheth's ingratitude, and the story, whether true or false, wounded his heart and filled it with sorrow.

Passing on, the king and his followers came to Bahurim ; and here another grief awaited him. Shimei came out to see the king as he passed by, and reviled

him and cursed, and 'he cast stones at David and at all the servants of king David.' Abishai proposed to punish him then and there, and said to the king, 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.' But David forbade him, and 'said to Abishai and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life; how much more may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look upon my affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.'

And Shimei was allowed to go on along the hillside over against David, cursing and throwing stones and dust at him.

Here again there is, in this humble acceptance of suffering, an evidence of the depth and reality of David's repentance.

David and his followers, warned by the messengers of the faithful Hushai, passed down the road towards Jericho, and in the night crossed the Jordan and pressed forward till they came to Mahanaim.

Absalom with his rebel army followed and crossed the Jordan in pursuit of the king.

And so the great king, the champion of Israel, the successful warrior and the great conqueror, was dethroned, put to flight, and banished by his own son—a vain young man of idle and licentious character, whose life was undistinguished by a single heroic deed.

But presently afterwards followed the battle, the rebel army was put to flight and the rebel leader, Absalom, was slain.

There is something surpassingly touching, first in the

charge given by David as to his son: 'Deal gently, for my sake, with the young man, even with Absalom.' And then, perhaps, even still more touching was his grief at his son's death: 'Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son.'

Now, in all this story we have brought before us the fact that David accepted in humble submission all the suffering which God saw fit to lay upon him in punishment for his sin; and thereby he was striving to make, so far as he could, satisfaction for his sin; and in this he is an example to us. This submission to punishment must ever be one of the elements in the spiritual life: suffering, realised as the penalty deserved for sin, and borne in resignation to the divine will, is one of the conditions of the development of the spiritual life.

But, beyond the lesson thus taught us, there is also much to be learned from the sequel of the story:

Presently the king returns, and very remarkable is the contrast which the story of his return presents to that of his flight. In his flight he went barefoot, mourning and weeping, and he was cursed, insulted and derided; but in his return he was escorted in triumph, honoured, welcomed and feared. As he fled he had some few faithful ones with him, but there were many who openly declared themselves to be his enemies. But in his return every one desired to be his friend.

We will pass over the story of the strife and jealousy which showed itself in the dispute between the tribes as to who should be the foremost in asking the king to return, and we will go on to consider for a few moments the cases of a few of the representative men who stood out most prominently in the history of that return.

First of all, Shimei 'hasted and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David,' and in fear and trembling he fell down before the king to sue for his pardon.

And well he might, for, as the king had gone forth in sorrow and in distress, he had heaped insults upon him, he had cursed him, and he had cast stones and dust at him in contempt and derision.

And, so far as appears from the story, there had been on his part no effort whatever to make atonement, there had been no sign of repentance. But, now that the king returns in power, he fears the punishment which he knows to be his due, and he comes in fear and trembling to sue for pardon ; that is all.

And he is pardoned for the time, and so opportunity is granted him for repentance—time that he may make some kind of reparation and do something to show that the sorrow he professed to feel was genuine ; and had he done this, had his after conduct been an evidence of his repentance, doubtless that pardon would never have been revoked. But there is no record of his having rightly used the opportunity given, there does not seem to have been any after effort to support the king, and to show his gratitude for the leniency shown him ; for the moment he had escaped punishment, but in the end his doom was pronounced by David on his death-bed. And so even here it is to be noticed that the 'mercy and judgment' of which we have already spoken lay at the root of the king's action.

Mephibosheth also came down to meet the king. There is something almost painfully sad about this meeting between David and Mephibosheth : between the king who had shown so much generosity, and the subject

who had received from him so much tender and thoughtful kindness. Years before, when David was settled in Jerusalem and was firmly seated on the throne of Israel, there came back to his mind the thought of all the loving friendship that had existed between himself and Jonathan the son of Saul ; and, for the love he bare to his lost friend, he determined to seek out any that might be yet left of his kindred, that he might shew kindness for the sake of the old friendship. So he sent for Ziba, a servant of Saul, and enquired, 'Is there yet any left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake ?' and 'Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.' His lameness had come about in this way : Mephibosheth was but a little child five years of age when his father died, and when the news came of the defeat of the Israelites by the Philistines, and of the fact that Jonathan had been slain in the battle, the nurse in whose care Mephibosheth had been left, caught up the child, and in her haste to fly, and save him, she let him fall, and thus he became lame on both his feet. David having heard of him, sent to Lo-debar and had him fetched from the house of Ammiel where he had remained ; he was brought to Jerusalem, and there David restored to him all the land of Saul ; and inasmuch as he by his lameness was incapacitated from taking any active part in its cultivation, Ziba the servant of Saul was appointed to till the farm, and to account to Mephibosheth for its produce, while Mephibosheth himself was received into the household of the king as an honoured and permanent guest.

He seems however to have made but a poor return for all this thoughtful care, for when the king went forth sorrowing into exile, Mephibosheth remained behind in

Jerusalem. But now that the king returns in triumph he comes down to meet him, and David puts to him the question : 'Wherefore wentest not thou with me, Mephibosheth ?' He had his excuse ready : 'My lord, O king, my servant deceived me, for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king ; because thy servant is lame. And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king.' And probably Mephibosheth's version of the story was the true one ; the excuse may have been a good and genuine one.

Ziba had indeed given a very different account of the matter ; and one story is good till another is told. But Ziba had certainly maligned his master in attributing to him motives which he could not have had.

In any case, however, if there had been in Mephibosheth the deep gratitude and the sincere affection which David's care and generosity called for, he would hardly have failed to have gone with the king ; he would have found some means or other to have done so. He found means to come down and meet the king now that he was returning to power. But, whatever his zeal may have lacked in the first instance, his repentance was at any rate sincere, he had certainly mourned for the king from the day of his departure till the day of his return.

David seems to have been in some doubt as to the sincerity of his excuse, and he gives him the benefit of the doubt. So once more we see 'mercy and judgment' still marking his action. Mephibosheth's apparent indifference is pardoned : 'Thou and Ziba divide the land.'

Now let us look at the case of Barzillai. How is it with him—that grand, devoted, faithful old man ?

He had every right to rejoice at the king's triumph. He had honoured the king in exile, he had helped him in distress, he had fed him and his servants, and nourished and cared for them at Mahanaim, the place where Jacob long centuries before had seen the angel of God, and had said, 'This is God's host ; and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.' Here it was that Barzillai, recognising God's host in the person of the 'Lord's anointed' and in his servants, helped and sustained them.

On his part there was no seeking for reward ; he had done his best to fulfil his duty and to prove his loyalty, but he repudiated the idea that there was aught due to him for that. His heart's desire was fulfilled when he had seen the king restored to his own again. But the king said to him, 'Come over with me and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem.' But no, Barzillai answered that he was now too old ; he would only be an encumbrance to the king ; why should he be a burden to him ? He can no longer taste what he eats or what he drinks, no longer enter into or enjoy the sights or the sounds of the glorious city ; and he prayed that he might be allowed to return to die and to be buried among his own people. Yet he was not ungrateful ; he will go a little way over Jordan with the king, and then accept for Chimham the honour offered to himself.

From this part of the story, too, there are lessons for us to learn.

Now we must ever be very careful in the use of types and figures. There is always a danger of their being pressed too far, and made to mean too much ; besides which, we should in the use of them always remember that no type, no figure is perfect in all respects.

But here is a type which we can hardly fail to see.

Y

David the king, rejected, banished, and exiled from Jerusalem, with persecution and insult—though all this came to him in punishment for his own sin—is surely in many ways a type of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings, going forth bearing all this, not for His own sins, for He was sinless, but for the sins of the whole world.

Our blessed Lord Jesus Christ was rejected by Jerusalem ; he, too, was mocked and reviled ; He wept over the apostate city ; He had a few faithful ones who wept and bewailed Him as they went forth ; He was betrayed by His own familiar friend, whose end was like that of Ahithophel. In his sorrows, too, there were those whose zeal prompted them to say, ‘Lord, shall we smite with the sword?’ He, too, had to say, ‘Put up again thy sword into his place.’ He, too, suffered the pang of the sense of separation from God, as He cried in the dark hour, though still clinging to His Father, ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me.’

And the end of all that sad scene was victory over the rebellion of man—though not as in the type by the destruction of the rebel, but by the death of Him who was rebelled against. In the type there was the cry of impotent grief, ‘Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!’ But in the case of the antitype there was the cry of Omnipotent love, ‘Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do.’ And there was the victory won by the death of the sinless One, Who gave His life for all His children.

And surely in the story of King David’s return we have a type of the future return of our King, Jesus Christ, who once ‘came to His own, and His own received Him

not,' but Who will then come again to receive His own unto Himself.

Ah, yes ! and then all will wish to be his friends. There are many, are there not ? who treat Him now as Shimei, Mephibosheth and Barzillai treated David in the days of his distress, exile and sorrow.

Alas ! Shimei has his followers to-day. There are the open blasphemers, those who reject their King altogether, who throw stones and dust at Him and at His servants, and abuse and deride His Church. In mercy they are spared for a time and the opportunity to repent is afforded them, and if only they do but use it aright pardon awaits them. But if that opportunity be neglected, if there be no true repentance, then no mere calling 'Lord, Lord' will avail them when the end comes.

Mephibosheth has also many followers to-day, those who have received great mercies and unstinted bounty at the King's hands, who have been surrounded by His loving care and providence, who have been fed at His table ; and yet who are cold-hearted and slack in their gratitude, and slow to remember Him and to help Him in His suffering ones. They are ever ready to plead their inability when it is a question of showing practical sympathy with His exiled and needy ones. To be ready with excuses is but a poor return to make for the many mercies received, even though the excuses may have some foundation. One thing is certain, and that is, that when our King returns He will know the true value of the excuses which we make, and the Judge of all the earth will do right.

But, thank God, Barzillai also has his followers to-day. He came down to conduct the king over Jordan ;

with him there was no cringing as in the case of Shimei ; he had no excuses to make as had Mephibosheth ; but with him it was all joy, the true joy of humility and unselfishness, the joy of that love that casts out fear. There are many like Barzillai now, who love and honour the King : those who are loyal to Him, who minister to their King in ministering to His Church, to His members, and who, when He comes again, will have the right to rejoice. Those who, doing their very best now, will then see how little they have done, and will say : ‘ Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee ? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink ? when saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in ? or naked, and clothed Thee ? or when saw we Thee sick or in prison, and came unto Thee ? ’ And the answer shall be : ‘ Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me,’ ‘ Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world,’ ‘ Come over with Me, and I will feed thee with Me in Jerusalem.’ And then, not like Barzillai, too old and too feeble, and too deaf, but with all their powers renewed, all spiritual perceptions revived, they will be fitted to sit at the marriage feast of the Lamb, fitted to sing with the heavenly choirs, and fitted ‘ to see the King in His beauty, and to behold the land that is very far off.’

The lesson, however, upon which we would now lay special stress is that taught us by David in his acceptance of the suffering which God saw fit to lay upon him in punishment for his sin. Sin, though repented of and forgiven, is nevertheless punished. In such punishment God’s love for the sinner should be realised. The humble acceptance and the patient bearing of punishment is one

of the fruits and signs of a true repentance. Repentance consists of contrition, confession, and satisfaction ; and the humble acceptance of suffering as being punishment due to sin forms part of that satisfaction ; and the hope of pardon will sustain the truly penitent in bearing that punishment as it sustained David. ‘ If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation : but if He shall say thus, I have no delight in thee ; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him.’ Here is the true spirit of humility in which suffering should be accepted. Such a spirit is an essential element in the spiritual life.

IV.

THE TRUE PRINCIPLE OF OFFERING.

‘I will surely buy it of thee at a price : neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.’

2 SAMUEL xxiv. 24.

SOME seven years had passed by since David's return to Jerusalem. After the collapse of the rebellion and the death of Absalom, David's reign was fast drawing to a close ; and in these later years of his life he again committed a great sin, and in this fact there lies for us all a lesson. Temptation does not cease as life goes on. It may change from time to time in form and character, but we are never safe from it so long as life lasts, and throughout the whole of life our blessed Lord's warning must be heeded : ‘ Watch and pray, lest ye fall into temptation.’ Satan assailed the Incarnate God from first to last. Our blessed Lord Himself said to His disciples, ‘ Ye are they that have continued with Me in My temptations.’ And if in His case temptations lasted throughout life, certainly Satan will not leave us without them.

But to return to the records of David's life. He who, in the days of his youth, had been anointed with oil in the midst of his brethren ; he upon whom the Spirit of the Lord came from that day forward ; he who

had so fully realised that he had the gift of God's Holy Spirit ; he who feared above all things to lose this gift and by the use of it had been nobly loyal to duty ; he who, moreover, had experienced the misery of having for a moment neglected to use the grace given to him, and had fallen into sin, had truly repented and had patiently borne his punishment—again in his old age fell away.

The story is exceedingly sad ; the fall was in a matter wherein it might have been least expected : a sin of pride and of self-confidence.

In his early days, David, trusting in God with all his heart, and using the strength that God gave him, slew the lion and the bear in defence of his flock. Later on, still trusting in God, he had gone against and slain Goliath of Gath, the enemy of God's people. In the days of his persecution and distress, putting his whole trust in the Lord, he had remained loyal in his duty to Saul. As king he had won many and great victories in the strength of the Lord of Hosts, 'Who girded him with the strength of war.' Trusting in God, he had 'fed his people with a faithful and true heart, and ruled them prudently with all his power.' Trusting in God, he had gone forth into exile, and had in God's good time returned to power. And then, when full of years God had given him the blessing of rest, he fell into one of those sins of unfaithfulness which he had previously said that he hated, and of which he had declared that no such sins should 'cleave unto him.'

Prosperity brake down in him that humble dependence upon God which had been his strength in times of adversity, trouble and danger, and he gave orders for the numbering of the people.

No notice seems to have been taken by him of the

law of God which required that a personal offering should be made at the times of such numbering of the people.

The act of the king would seem to have been prompted by a feeling of pride in his vast army, and by a spirit which, trusting in the arm of the flesh alone, was contemplating some still larger military organisation for the consolidation and extension of the empire. And it was a sin so great and so marked, that not only the captains of the host, but even Joab, bad as he was in many ways, was shocked by it.

Surely in David's thus falling away from God we have a much needed warning. Alas ! it is by no means an uncommon thing for those who in the earlier days of adversity and trouble have put their whole trust in God, and who have endeavoured to serve him faithfully, to fall away from Him in later life, when by His blessing ease and security have been to a certain extent secured to them : men will often in later life forget to trust in God alone, and will place their confidence in the very things which He has vouchsafed to give them as the reward of their earlier faithfulness.

In the days of poverty and anxiety a man will be very faithful and true and put his whole trust in God, and do his best to serve Him in all things ; and then, when his efforts have been blessed, when temporal anxiety has been removed, and when wealth has come to him, he will put his trust in that.

In times of sickness a man will often pray to God and trust in Him, as did Hezekiah, and then when health is restored, even that is trusted to as though it were to last for ever.

There is always great danger in prosperity. Gene-

rally speaking, there is more danger of forsaking God in seasons of prosperity than in times of adversity.

It was so in the case of David. He was tempted, and he yielded to the temptation, to commit the two sins which stained and saddened his life, in and through prosperity.

It was so in the case of Hezekiah, who was tempted and yielded to temptation in the days of his restored health. 'Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation,' is a warning more than ever needed in the times of ease and prosperity.

We go on now to notice that this sin of numbering the people apart from, and without any reference to, the law of God as laid down by Moses, was a sin so marked and so grievous that it shocked Joab ; he was startled to find David of all men contemplating it. Joab went further and remonstrated with the king ; and at any rate on this occasion gave him good advice when he said, 'The Lord make His people an hundred times so many more as they be : but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants ? why then doth my lord require this thing ? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel ?'

David however refused to listen to Joab's remonstrance, and persisting in his purpose, the numbering took place ; though in the execution of the king's commands he was deceived, for 'the king's word was abominable to Joab,' and therefore Levi and Benjamin were omitted by him from the census.

The sin having been committed, David's heart smote him. In this case there was no delay, no hesitation, but earnest and deep repentance followed immediately after the sin.

God had not left him, though he for the moment had

forgotten God ; God touched his heart, and he repented at once ; there came to him the prophet with God's message. This time there was no need of the parable to bring home to him the sin. He acknowledged it at once, and accepted at once the punishment. He was offered three things—the famine, the sword, or the pestilence ; and he left himself entirely in God's hands, accepting the punishment declared to be due to this very act of numbering the people without reference to the law of God.

The plague began and the people were dying on all hands. And now, in what follows in the story, we see the evidences of the reality of David's repentance. There was contrition ; he was grieved and pained at the thought of the sin he had committed. There was confession of sin to God, and he confessed it publicly before his people. He openly humbled himself before God ; he went forth clothed in sackcloth with the elders of Israel, and prayed that the punishment might fall upon himself, and that the people might be spared, and said to God, 'Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered ? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed ; but as for these sheep, what have they done ? let thine hand, I pray thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house ; but not on Thy people, that they should be plagued.'

Directed by God's prophet Gad, the king thus repenting, went to where Ornan was threshing his corn. The threshing-floor of Ornan was probably a smooth rock on the top of Mount Moriah, just outside the city, north-east of Mount Sion. Thus far the plague had already spread. Here the king saw the destroying 'angel stand between the earth and the heaven, having

a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem.' Bidden by Gad to offer a sacrifice, David at once proposed to buy the threshing-floor, that he might then and there offer the sacrifice in atonement for his sins, and as an intercession for his people. Ornan, with kingly generosity, offered to give it all to David; but the king refused and said, 'Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.'

Then, Ornan consenting, David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen and the threshing instruments. An altar was built unto God, the offerings were laid upon it. The king 'called upon the Lord and He answered him from Heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering,' and the plague was stayed. God accepted the sacrifice, and not only so, but He vouchsafed to give a special mark of acceptance by sending fire from Heaven to consume it.

Once before this special mark of acceptance had been given, when immediately after the consecration of Aaron, the fire, which was afterwards kept ever burning on the altar till the building of Solomon's Temple, came down from Heaven and consumed the sacrifice; again, later, at the consecration of the Temple of Solomon; and also long years afterwards on Mount Carmel, this special sign of acceptance was granted when Elijah offered his sacrifice there.

Now there are here certain general lessons that we shall, perhaps, do well to notice before we go on to speak of that special lesson as to the principle of offering which the story so forcibly teaches.

In the first place, then, it is to be noticed that

spiritual sin does bring temporal punishment. David's sin, in this instance, was a sin of pride, forgetfulness of God, and trusting in man, in the arm of the flesh. The punishment was a pestilence which destroyed men's bodies.

In the next place we notice here that the sin of the ruler brings disaster to those over whom he rules; whether it be the monarch at the head of his nation, or the priest ruling over his parish, or the head of a house ruling over his family, in every case the sin of the ruler brings evil to those over whom he is placed; all sin involves others, besides the sinner, in some way or other, in its consequences. And in the last place we certainly learn here that God, Who changes not, Who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, does answer prayer, does accept true repentance, and does on true repentance remove national calamities and punitive visitations.

And it seems to us that these are truths which, there is too much reason to fear, are very much overlooked in the present day.

But to pass on to the special lesson to be learned from this story as to the principle of offering. Whatever we offer to God must be offered at some cost to ourselves. That must be the principle upon which those who are living in union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ will make their offerings to God.

Now, if any spot in the whole world could bear witness to this principle, surely it was this threshing-floor of Ornan.

Here it was that, long centuries before, Abraham had, in will and purpose, offered up his only son Isaac : that son in whom were centred all his best and highest

hopes; and through whom were to be fulfilled those promises of God which he so firmly believed. It were indeed difficult to measure the cost to Abraham at which that offering was made; the offering was certainly not made without cost to the father, even though in the end the ram was accepted in the place of his son. Here it was also that this principle of offering was distinctly enunciated by David when he bought the spot from its owner at its full value, that he might offer his sacrifice 'not without cost.' Here David henceforth determined that the Temple should be built. Where his offering had been accepted in atonement for his sin and as an intercession for his people, there should be the site of the Temple wherein the ordained sacrifices should be continually offered. Here David prepared for the Temple at great cost. Here Solomon built the Temple at great cost. Here all the long line of sacrifices were duly offered, not without cost. Here, above all, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, bearing His cross, went forth to that great Sacrifice in which He offered Himself for the sins of the whole world.

The cost of that sacrifice is too vast for the mind to grasp: the soul can but bow in adoring wonder before that act of unspeakable love.

Now, all our offerings—in so far as they are offered on this principle, viz., that they cost us something—are so far in harmony with the sacrifice of Christ, and will be acceptable to God. And this applies to all those minor offerings which we are bound to offer to God: our time, which must be given to Him; our many gifts and powers, which must be dedicated to His service; our money and our wealth, of which some part must be given to Him, to His Church for the furtherance of His work in

the world, and to His poor. In all these things it is easy to see that they must be offered 'not without cost.'

But we have to carry the principle further than this. Let us try to look at the matter in another way, as bearing upon the question of Holy Communion. That which is the highest act in which we can offer to the Lord our God must be offered on the same principle, viz., that it must cost us something.

Now we are all of us bound to offer to God an offering in atonement for our sins and as an intercession for others.

But, of ourselves, we have nothing to offer ; we have nothing of our own that is worthy of His acceptance ; we have nothing to offer that can be pleaded in satisfaction for sin, or that will avail to stay the hand of the destroying angel.

We stand very much in the same position as David did on Mount Moriah : penitent and desiring to offer a sufficient sacrifice worthy of God's acceptance, but with nothing to offer, and therefore powerless.

But Christ our King freely offers to us the means of offering to God that which He will and must accept, both in atonement for our sins and as an intercession for others.

In Holy Communion we may offer and plead the merits of the Passion and Death of the Son of God.

Here is an offering which God will accept ; an offering which is all-worthy of His acceptance ; an offering which will avail to stay the hand of the destroying angel, since it is the one ' full, perfect, and sufficient atonement, and satisfaction for the sins of the world.'

and it is freely offered to us to offer ; but in

joining in that great act, which, by His direction, His Church is to continue till He come again, we must do so on the principle that the offering must cost us something.

Let us try to explain a little more in detail what we mean. Our blessed Lord Jesus Christ said, 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.'

Now let us apply this saying to the question of Holy Communion.

Now all those who are trying to live the spiritual life, that is, as we have so often said, trying to live the ordinary daily life in union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, do frequent the blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood.

We are bound to offer This. It is 'our bounden duty and service.'

But we are also bound before offering It to remember whether our brother hath aught against us. We are bound to examine ourselves as to our repentance, our faith, and our love—as to our duty, that is, to God and man.

Has our brother aught against us? Who is our brother? Jesus Christ.

First, then, we must be reconciled to Him. How? By true repentance ; contrition, confession, and satisfaction, these are the three parts of true repentance, and repentance cannot be complete if any one of these three parts be wanting.

There must be sorrow for sin, not merely because of the misery it has brought us, or because of the fear of the punishment that it may yet bring, but the sorrow

prompted by a love that grieves at the thought of rebellion against God Who is love. There must be not merely sorrow for sin, but confession of sin ; there must be the full acknowledgment of guilt without the pleading of any excuses. And in the last place there must be real and definite purpose of amendment of life—the forsaking of sin, the breaking with evil habit, the cultivation of virtue. All this involves cost to self. The offering must be made, but not without that cost. ‘First be reconciled to thy Brother, and then come and offer thy gift.’ The command to offer the gift is imperative, but if we are to offer it acceptably it must be at some cost to ourselves.

Ornan proposed to give to David the threshing-floor and the oxen and the threshing instruments ; and David might have accepted the gift without cost, and might have made the offering without cost to himself, and God might have accepted it ; but then it would have been Ornan’s offering apart from David. And David rightly felt that if it were to be his offering, and if he were to be accepted through it, it must be made at some cost to himself. So it is with this all-perfect Offering : we are bidden to offer It, the means whereby we are to plead that all-sufficient Sacrifice are freely given to us : we who of ourselves have nothing to plead are thus enabled to plead what can never cease to avail. We, who are not worthy to offer to Him any sacrifice, are yet permitted in His mercy to offer This ; and provided that It be offered at the cost to ourselves of true and sincere repentance, we shall be accepted through the Offering.

V.

*THE DEATH OF THE MAN AFTER
GOD'S OWN HEART.*

'He died in a good old age, full of days, riches and honour : and Solomon his son reigned in his stead.'—1 CHRON. xxix. 28.

WE come now to the last scene in David's life ; and in thinking of it let us first look back and recall some of the leading features of that life, as it stands out in many ways a grand and noble example of what the Christian's life should be. First, then, going back through half a century, we saw him as a youth, called to a great and difficult task, promised a noble and illustrious future, and offered a royal crown. He was anointed by Samuel in the midst of his brethren, and the spirit of the Lord came upon him from that day forward.

David for a time then went back to the quiet and commonplace work of tending his father's sheep. But, knowing that the gift of God's Holy Spirit had been given him, and fearing to lose it, he made constant use of the grace he had received. He, in the strength of God, slew the lion and the bear that came against his flock. He made in all things the best use that he possibly could of the opportunities he had, and he thus prepared himself continually for the work God had for him to do in later

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life. He was ever loyal to duty. To the quiet of the hillside of Bethlehem succeeded the difficulties and the dangers of Saul's court, where, still loyal to duty, it is said of him that 'David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was much set by.'

Then had followed the time of Saul's bitter persecution, during which David remained loyal to him in the face of many temptations.

The opening of his reign, during the years that he remained at Hebron, had been in the main occupied in quelling rebellion and disorder. Once settled at Jerusalem, he fixed the seat of government there, and then the serious work of his life began. The work that lay before him presented many difficulties. It was a work of reformation in the first instance. He set about his work wisely and well. He began with himself; he determined that 'mercy and judgment' should rule his conduct. He chose his household and his inner circle of companions and friends for the moral beauty of their characters; and thus his influence for good was to extend. He desired to have the symbols of God's presence with him in the very heart, so to speak, of the nation.

He brought up the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem; and thus he had there, at the seat of government, the law of God as represented by the tables of stone, the authorised priesthood as typified by the rod of Aaron, and the supernatural grace of God as typified by the pot of Manna, and, above all these things, the mercy seat, where the presence of the Almighty was mysteriously manifested.

The desire of his heart had been thus expressed: 'O when wilt Thou come unto me?' And he never rested till

he had brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, and had placed it in the Tabernacle which he had there prepared for it. But, beyond this, he had proposed to build a Temple wherein to place the Ark. He was, however, told by God that he himself should not build it, but that his son should do so in a time of peace; and the remembrance of that promise seems never permanently to have left his mind.

He had sinned and he had repented truly and heartily, and repenting he had been pardoned. The reality of that repentance had been testified to by the way in which he accepted the punishment God saw fit to lay upon him. He had gone into exile and borne his sorrows, he had been brought back again and restored to his throne.

Once more in his later years he had again fallen into sin—the sin of numbering the people in his pride—and then had followed immediate, full, and deep repentance. But the punishment came: the pestilence had been sent, and the people died. David had gone forth in sackcloth and humbled himself before God. He bought the threshing-floor of Ornan, and the sacrifice he offered was accepted, the hand of the destroying angel was stayed, and the plague ceased.

And then in deep and humble gratitude the king made his resolution and said, ‘This is the house of God, and this is the altar of burnt sacrifice for Israel.’ Words full of prophetic meaning; far more so, probably, than at the time he imagined.

All through his life David had kept this purpose of building the Temple in view. He had been making preparations for it. He had all along dedicated to this purpose his wealth and his spoils. He had latterly kept this work before him as that to which his son would succeed.

But now, when the whole work was forming itself into shape in his mind, more definite preparation is made. Here where the sacrifice had been accepted; here where the fire had come down from heaven and consumed it; here where he had openly confessed his sin, and where God's mercy had been extended to him in pardon and in remission of punishment—here should the Temple of God be built.

So the site was bought and secured; the stones for the building were hewn and prepared; the silver and gold, the iron and brass, and wood, and precious things, were all stored up. The plans and designs for the Temple and for all its beautiful details were drawn from Heaven-given patterns; and Solomon was carefully trained in all the knowledge he needed, and was fully impressed with the dignity and importance of the work to which he was to succeed.

And then comes the last scene. David had called together at Jerusalem a vast gathering of the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes and the leaders of the people, the captains and all mighty and valiant men, and all the congregation.

And in the presence of this vast and brilliant assembly the aged monarch stood up upon his feet and gave them his last charge, one of the noblest and most touching addresses ever given by a ruler to his people: 'Hear me, my brethren, and my people: as for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: but God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for My name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood.' And then he went on to tell them how God had chosen

Solomon his son to be his successor, and that Solomon should build the Temple; that God had promised to be with Solomon: 'And He said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build My house and My courts: for I have chosen him to be My son, and I will be his Father.'

Then he went on to urge, both upon the people and upon their future king, faithfulness in keeping the laws of God. Then he publicly gave to Solomon his son all the plans and designs for the Temple, with all its courts, adjuncts, and fittings, and 'the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit:' all these designs and plans he said 'the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern.'

Then, not only did he give to Solomon the inspired plan for the building, but he supplied him with the material with which he was to build the Temple. He offered the great stores he had laid up of gold and silver and precious stones, of iron and brass and wood, of marble and hewn stone.

And then, in the noble generosity of his heart, he would let others help in this great work; after he had made his own offering, he gave to the princes and the people in their turn the opportunity of helping by their gifts, and they responded right loyally, and 'the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord, and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.'

Next there followed David's solemn thanksgiving; the heart of the noble old man, overflowing with gratitude for the approaching fulfilment of his life's desire: 'Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name.'

Then he offered his prayer for the people and for the king who should rule over them :

‘ I know also, my God, that Thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things : and now have I seen with joy Thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto Thee.’

‘ O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Thy people, and prepare their heart unto Thee: and give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep Thy commandments, Thy testimonies, and Thy statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace, for the which I have made provision.’

And then all this was concluded by the solemn sacrifices offered on the following day amid great gladness: the enthronement of Solomon and the loyal submission of the people.

And David, having done all that could be done for the nation, ‘ he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour : and Solomon his son reigned in his stead.’ A happy, peaceful, and glorious end to a long, and noble, and loyal life.

‘ He died : and Solomon his son reigned in his stead.’ Those are words in which is expressed an experience which is universal. It is what is happening every day.

‘ He died : and Solomon his son reigned in his stead.’ So it always is, whether in the nation, or the parish, or the household, or in the world at large—one dies and another reigns. One monarch dies, and another ascends the throne ; one priest passes away, and another serves

at the altar ; one head of the household dies, and another immediately succeeds him. One generation passes away, another generation follows it. The ever-recurring story of life is that which is repeated here : 'He died : and Solomon his son reigned in his stead.'

Ah ! and well were it that it could be said of each life as it ended that it was 'in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour'—days that had been spent in the service of God, the riches of grace and virtue, and the honour that attaches to the loyal life.

What is it that really makes the glory of each successive reign, whether it be that of the monarch, or of the priest, or of the head of the household, or of the individual member of society, or of any generation ? Not that which is concerned simply and solely with that reign alone ; not that which has no reference whatever to the future ; but that which makes and leaves a mark for good which shall last on into the future, that which shall not cease with the end of the reign, but the beneficent influence of which shall be felt afterwards as well. Great deeds and worthy deeds are those which secure and leave a legacy of blessing to the future.

The glory of David's reign lay in the fact, first, that his conquests were such as to bring peace and prosperity to future generations, as really as they had brought security to the nation in his own time ; and above all it lay in this, that he had so prepared for the future that after he had passed away the nation was to become greater and stronger ; Jerusalem was to be made still more glorious and beautiful, the worship of God yet more perfect, and all its adjuncts far more splendid than it had been even in his own day.

Surely in all this he is a pattern and an example to

us all. By his faithful valour he secured to the nation a time of peace in which to build the Temple. He it was who had prepared the materials for the building of that Temple. He it was who drew the plans and designs from which it was to be built. It was he who instructed Solomon as to his work, and by his whole life inspired him with zeal; and who by his burning words had kindled enthusiasm both in the heart of his son and in the hearts of his people.

But it was God who gave to Solomon the wisdom to use all this aright, and it was God who put it into the hearts of the people to second and support Solomon in carrying out the work.

Now it is true, is it not? that the man lives a noble and a useful life who lays up for future generations to use any store of knowledge, whether of learning, or of science, or of arts; and if this be true, and we imagine that all will readily admit that it is true, how much more noble and useful is the life of that man who lays up in the minds of others, and so for those who are to come after him, precious stores of that knowledge which has to do with God and the things of eternity—religious knowledge and practice, faith and worship; who both by his life and his words kindles in the hearts of others enthusiasm in the great work of proclaiming and spreading the highest of all knowledge, the knowledge of God, and thus promotes the dignity and the glory of the worship of the Almighty! And this is what all may do.

The building up of the Temple of God, the Church of Christ, is the work in which we are all of us in some sense or other to be engaged, and this work should ever hold a central place in our thoughts. The Church is made up of her members, Jesus Christ being the head.

Each one of us is a temple of God, through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit ; and by God's grace we are to make ourselves temples meet for him ; by His grace this building is to go on day by day as we live our life in union with our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

David had said, 'Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries : I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death.'

And we are very much like Solomon ; we too, like him, are 'young and tender, and the work is great : for the palace is not for man, but for the Lord God.'

And we must imitate Solomon and give ourselves to the work of building up the materials provided for us on the plans supplied to us.

The materials have been provided in generous profusion by Him, of Whom David was a type, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

There is vast store 'of the silver and gold and of the precious stones, glistening stones and of divers colours,' all the graces and virtues that are in Him, and 'the hewn stones' prepared by all His sufferings.

Not only have the materials been supplied, but we have also had given to us the heavenly design and pattern of His perfect life to copy. We are to build up ourselves temples meet for Him on this pattern. The knowledge and wisdom and grace needed for this work are given to us in His holy teaching and in all the means of grace. The Holy Spirit gives to us, if only we will seek it and use it, the power to follow His example.

It remains for us to do as Solomon did, and give

ourselves heart and soul to carry out the work to which we have been called, and in the strength that God gives to build the temple.

But we may imitate David too. We may lay up stores for the use of those who are to come after us ; we may set them a good example ; we may encourage and help them by keeping before them the great duty of glorifying God ; and we may kindle in their hearts zeal and enthusiasm.

We may not be able to do much from our point of view, and like David we may have to say, 'Who am I and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort ? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.'

But, doing the little we can do, we may add something to the splendour of the Church of God, if only one soul be taught and led by us to live the high and the noble spiritual life.

And now let us once more note very briefly the main lessons which the story of David teaches us in these scenes in his life on which we have touched.

First, we must realise the fact that we have been called to a great and difficult work ; that there has been made to us the promise of a splendid future and the offer of a glorious crown ; and that with this call, promise, and offer there has been given to us the power to do the work, to fulfil the destiny, and to win and wear the crown.

Realising this, let us fear above all things to lose this gift of grace, let us yield ourselves up to the guiding of God's holy Spirit, and constantly use the grace given to us, and so by its use prepare ourselves for that future, both here and hereafter, which God may have in store for us, and ever remain loyal to duty.

Next, let us seek to have God's presence with us continually, the presence which is vouchsafed to us in His Church, through His word, His priesthood, and His sacraments.

Let us choose our friends and our companions, our books, and our secret thoughts, on the same principle as that upon which David chose his household and his inner circle of friends and associates, not merely for their gifts of bravery, brilliancy, or cleverness, but for the beauty of their moral character, for their truth and honesty, their humility and godliness.

Let us strive to be loyal to our King now, ministering to Him and honouring Him, and sustaining Him now in His members, if hereafter, when He returns, we would be His friends, and have Him say to us, 'Come ye blessed children of My Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.'

Let us repent us truly of our sins, and make our offerings to God on the principle that they shall cost us something ; and, lastly, let us strive to lead such lives that when we pass away we may leave to others that come after us some legacy of blessing.

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